

After the pandemic, BUILDING BACK A STRONGER MEDIA

INSPIRING INITIATIVES IN ENSURING MEDIA VIABILITY

promising initiatives from media companies and their support organizations around the world, in the hope that these successful strategies and practices will inspire and guide others. Though it contains a relatively small number of cases, they represent a wide variety of innovative ideas from different countries and situations.

The decline of independent news media, which some have referred to as an extinction event, has an impact on the very foundations of our societies. It is not just a question of failing businesses, without independent news media, corruption and incompetence thrive, and good governance is weakened. Today the need for the quality information provided by independent and strong news outlets, and more of them, has never been greater.

In many societies, news media has long relied on the market to help ensure sustainability and diversity, with advertising and sales paying for the independent journalism that citizens need to make informed decisions. But the market has changed and today it is failing due to a variety of factors, posing an existential threat to media everywhere. This should trigger alarm bells and lead to much greater attention from governments, intergovernmental organizations, foundations, non-governmental organizations and media support organizations. The development of new policy approaches by governments, donors and marketers to help ensure the survival of independent media is essential.

But these essential initiatives will also only work in conjunction with bottom-up initiatives from media enterprises themselves. As the stories in this publication attest, there are many at grassroots level busy developing new strategies and business models to confront the challenges.

With an understanding that journalism is a public good, UNESCO has recognized the threat to independent media and has endorsed a concerted effort to strengthen their viability.

UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) has undertaken a major initiative in this area. This covers research, consultations, knowledge sharing and policy recommendations – all aimed at ensuring that diverse and credible media continue to fulfill their essential roles. This publication is one of the outputs.

The IPDC is the only multilateral forum in the UN system designed to mobilize the international community to discuss the promote media development and a healthy environment for the growth of free and pluralistic media. For more than 40 years, the IPDC has focused its projects on the most urgent priorities in communication development all around the world.

Ensuring the viability of independent media is fundamentally important to all other initiatives in media development. The best training course has no relevance as if newswriters are running on skeleton staffs. When media are weak they can end up serving narrow business and political interests, and into the gap dis- and misinformation can spread unchecked.

And it is not just a matter of securing the viability and strengthening these existing outlets so they can better cover issues like the pandemic, climate change and artificial intelligence. Our societies need a major expansion of news production, including an influx of new enterprises that can deliver journalism to all sectors of the population, in the languages and localities where people are based.

Through partnerships like this, the IPDC is taking a holistic approach to media viability. This means assessing the entire media environment, to see how it can become more enabling at this point in history. There is a need to study media companies and their practices, as well as the economic factors, regulations and policies that inhibit or strengthen media viability, all with the aim of pinpointing exactly what can be done to make media even stronger.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for the world to make progress on "public access to information and fundamental freedoms". Without this, it is hard to imagine optimum advances in the range of SDG aspirations. And without sustainable journalism, it is hard to see how societies can have the information and freedoms they need to make the world a better place.

"Business models do not work in emergency situations," said during UNESCO's World Press Freedom Conference in 2020, and it was easy to imagine the media leaders in newswriters around the world nodding their heads in agreement.

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News media have been working for years to develop new business models, some with success, but in too many places the revenues that sustain them have become inadequate. This makes them vulnerable to failure, or too weakened to resist capture by political and business interests that compromise their independence. This is particularly true in the developing world, but it is weakening societies everywhere.

Independent media the world over therefore need additional support to strengthen their viability if they are to continue to provide the news and information that are essential to democracy and sustainable development. "Building back better" should mean not just halting the slide, but adding new outlets and news providers – including participation by groups who have been relatively marginal in terms of media ownership and control.

While the situation is dire, there is hope. More and more people are looking at the changes needed in the enabling environment for media – like in public funding or requiring revenue transfers from Internet companies – all in ways that do not compromise editorial independence and journalistic standards. Complementing this bigger picture are a range of initiatives by journalists, innovators and media development advocates. Many of these explore alternative business models and aim in other ways to strengthen media viability – from identifying new readership, innovating advertising and sponsorship strategies, alternatives like non-profit models, networking for collaborative news production, and innovative use of technology and start-up training.

These initiatives originate from all sectors – of course, within the media community itself, but also from officials, academia, civil society, and the private sector entrepreneurs.

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Inspiration and Action Amidst Doom and Gloom

The crisis facing independent news media, whether online or offline or hybrid, presents an existential threat to our societies. This has been made clear particularly during the pandemic which highlighted a paradox: While media became more important than ever for citizens as a source of reliable information in an insecure and continuously changing world, newsrooms struggled to pay their bills.

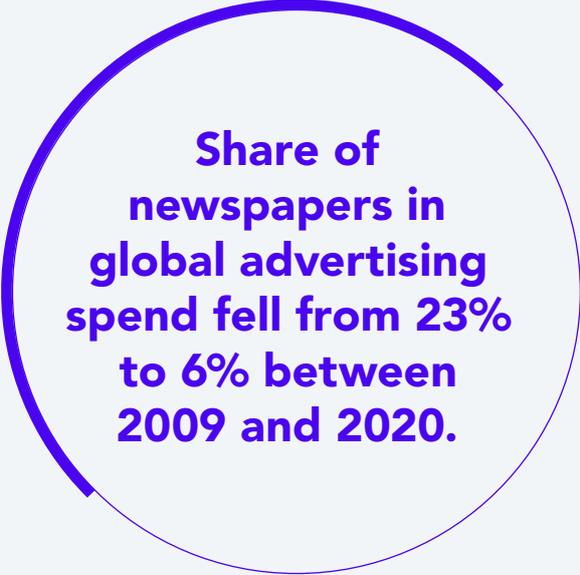
The pandemic brought to crisis point prior trends - for example, between 2009 to 2020, the share of newspapers – key producers of journalism – in global advertising spend fell from 23 to 6 percent.

Amidst the gloom of increasing financial pressure, there is a lot to learn from the creativity and actions taken by media in their effort for survival: Journalists, publishers, educators and other media workers have developed and are developing innovative strategies to help strengthen the viability of independent media.

This publication showcases some of these inspiring and educational micro-stories:

- success in cross-border collaboration for investigative journalism;
- revenue-earning fact-checking services that combat disinformation;
- new business models that leverage audience and advertiser needs;
- entrepreneurial education for the next generation of journalists; and much more.

These enterprise-level steps are essential complements to the need for bigger changes in national policies to save - and stimulate - media development all around the world.



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unesco

"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

After the pandemic,

Building Back a Stronger Media

Inspiring Initiatives in Ensuring Media Viability

Larry Kilman

Table of contents

Foreword	7
-----------------	----------

Introduction	9
---------------------	----------

Independent news media are facing an existential threat, but many are responding with pro-active solutions to strengthen viability so citizens continue to receive the credible news and information they need. This handbook looks at innovative and promising ventures from around the world.

CHAPTER 1

Latin America: Strengthening entrepreneurial journalism	11
--	-----------

As the media world changes rapidly, journalism schools find it difficult to keep up, particularly when training journalists to start their own enterprises. New curricula for entrepreneurial journalism can help.

CHAPTER 2

Indonesia: Where the advertising business model for media still works	16
--	-----------

While media in many countries are ceding the battle for advertising revenue to platforms like Google and Facebook, some of the world's most populated countries are taking a different direction, and going head to head with the giants.

CHAPTER 3

Chile: Payment platform helps independent and local media gain revenue	22
---	-----------

Collecting money from subscribers or small donors can be a difficult task for independent and local media outlets, one that takes time and resources and is not part of journalists' core skill set. Revenu, a subscription management platform designed for start-ups, small digital media and non-profits, provides a promising approach.

CHAPTER 4

Lebanon: Making a successful transition from print to digital	28
--	-----------

It is not just the big Western media that are making the successful switch from print to digital; even in hard-hit Lebanon, in the midst of an economic collapse, a media company thrives by understanding its audience and providing what it needs in new ways.

CHAPTER 5

Europe and Africa: Advocacy comes in all shapes and sizes	37
--	-----------

At first glance, the European Publishers Council and the Zambian Free Press Initiative have little in common. One represents some of the world's biggest publishers, and the other defends journalists in a sparsely populated country. But they do align when it comes to their underlying mission: proactively working to create a better environment for sustainable independent news media.

CHAPTER 6

South Africa: Community media take on new role

44

Community radio in South Africa explores a deeper meaning of “community”, providing services that go far beyond the usual radio output: they fundraise to pay for school uniforms, provide activities for seniors and children, and even help underwrite funerals, all while carrying out their core mission of informing the public. Keeping viable is not only a business priority but a cultural one as well.

CHAPTER 7

Global: Protecting the independence of public service media

50

Public service media have a different set of business challenges than private media, but they too are threatened by growing authoritarianism and populism. Like their commercial counterparts, public media are innovating to protect their independence and their revenue.

CHAPTER 8

Brazil: Fact-checking, a core skill of news media, emerges as a business strategy

56

Fact-checking is part of journalistic DNA: For many reporters and their outlets the world over, fact-checking is the core of credible journalism. Now, in an age of growing mis- and disinformation, it is also a way to increase revenue.

CHAPTER 9

Pakistan: How the Jang Media Group emerged from the pandemic

60

Things were already bad for news media businesses when COVID-19 hit. Here’s the story of one media company’s pro-active campaign to bring back business and readers in the face of the downturn.

CHAPTER 10

The Caribbean: Cross-border collaboration strengthens investigative journalism

65

The Caribbean region is comprised of a lot of small island countries and correspondingly small media. When news organizations combine their resources across borders to collaborate on investigative journalism, they strengthen the whole.

CHAPTER 11

Global: A fund for new approaches to media development

73

As media markets collapse, the search for new ways to support independent media becomes critical. One new initiative that hold promise is the International Fund for Public Interest Media, which seeks to raise US\$1 billion in new funds for media development and redefine media assistance.

References and Resources

77

Strengthening media viability means strengthening societies and development, and has become a goal of many. Here, then, is a selection of resources aimed at making independent media stronger and more sustainable.

Foreword

In many societies, news media have long relied on the market to help ensure sustainability and diversity, with advertising and sales paying for the independent journalism that citizens need to make informed decisions. But the market has changed and today it is failing due to a variety of factors, posing an existential threat to media everywhere.

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In November 2021, UNESCO's 193 Member States approved the Windhoek+30 Declaration on "Information as a Public Good", which recognizes the need for action to support media viability. In this context, UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) is undertaking relevant research, consultations, knowledge sharing and policy recommendations. The aim is that a diverse, credible and viable media can fulfill their essential roles. This publication is one of the outputs of this initiative.

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The World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) is a key partner with UNESCO in efforts to address the challenges. Through partnerships like this, the IPDC is taking a holistic approach to media viability. This means assessing the entire media environment, to see how it can become more enabling at this point in history. There is a need to study media companies and their practices, as well as the economic factors, regulations and policies that inhibit or strengthen media viability, all with the aim of pinpointing exactly what can be done to make media even stronger.

Therefore, in addition to this handbook, UNESCO is overseeing:

- ▶ Research, led by the Economist Intelligence Unit and drawing on the IPDC's draft Media Viability Indicators (MVIs);
- ▶ Knowledge exchanges and wider consultations, organized by a Dutch-based NGO, Free Press Unlimited, to identify and share best practices and innovations, as well as determine the governmental and legal issues that strengthen or hinder media viability;
- ▶ Policy recommendations for UNESCO Member States and other stakeholders, formulated in collaboration with experts from the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and Columbia University.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for the world to make progress on “public access to information and fundamental freedoms”. Without this, it is hard to imagine optimum advances in the range of SDG aspirations. And without sustainable journalism, it is hard to see how societies can have the information and freedoms they need to make the world a better place.

Guy Berger

*Director for Policies and Strategies on
Communication and Information at UNESCO*

Introduction

“Business models do not work in emergency situations,” said Iryna Vidanava, CEO of City Dog magazine in Belarus during UNESCO’s World Press Freedom Conference in 2020, and it was easy to imagine media leaders in newsrooms around the world nodding their heads in agreement.

“This crisis is an opportunity not to re-invent journalism, but to redefine the media as a trusted source of news,” she said of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which credible, independent news and information was a life-saving contribution to societies everywhere, providing both health information and countering the rampant mis- and disinformation, which is a growing crisis in itself.

Independent news media were already facing an existential threat when COVID-19 hit. Their business models were severely disrupted by the digital revolution, with a massive loss of advertising revenue to the giant digital platforms like Google and Facebook. Without this traditional source of funding in many places, news outlets are closing, journalists are losing their jobs, and communities are being left without a reliable source of local news.

News media have been working for years to develop new business models, some with success, but in too many places the revenues that sustain them have become inadequate. This makes them vulnerable to failure, or too weakened to resist capture by political and business interests that compromise their independence. This is particularly true in the developing world, but it is weakening societies everywhere.

Independent media the world over therefore need additional support to strengthen their viability if they are to continue to provide the news and information that are essential to democracy and sustainable development. “Building back better” should mean not just halting the slide, but adding new outlets and news providers – including participation by groups that have been relatively marginal in terms of media ownership and control.

While the situation is dire, there is hope. More and more people are looking at the changes needed in the enabling environment for media – like in public funding or requiring revenue transfers from Internet companies – all in ways that do not compromise editorial independence and journalistic standards. Complementing this bigger picture are a range of initiatives by journalists, innovators and media development advocates. Many of these explore

alternative business models and aim in other ways to strengthen media viability – from identifying new readership, innovating advertising and sponsorship strategies, alternatives like non-profit models, networking for collaborative news production, and innovative use of technology and start-up training.

These initiatives originate from all sectors – of course, within the media community itself, but also from officials, academia, civil society, and private sector entrepreneurs.

This handbook examines some of these promising initiatives from media companies and their support organizations around the world, in the hope that these successful strategies and practices will inspire and guide others. Though it contains a relatively small number of cases, they represent a wide variety of innovative ideas from different countries and situations.

The decline of independent news media, which some have referred to as an extinction event, has an impact on the very foundations of our societies. It is not just a question of failing businesses; without independent news media, corruption and incompetence thrive, and good governance is weakened. Today the need for the quality information provided by independent and strong news outlets has never been greater.

CHAPTER 1

Latin America: Strengthening entrepreneurial journalism



As the media world changes rapidly, journalism schools find it difficult to keep up. The relevant skills journalists need today are often missing from their curricula, particularly when they concern the business of journalism. In today's media environment, when jobs are scarce, more journalists have to strike out on their own, but lack business skills to create their own digital news enterprises.

Without those skills, even the best-intentioned reporters and storytellers will likely fail to build sustainable enterprises from which to share their work.

Mijal Iastrebnier, co-Founder and Director of SembraMedia, experienced this knowledge gap first-hand. For three years, while still in university, she ran a popular magazine in Buenos Aires called *Cultra*, but struggled to develop a revenue model when newsprint shortages decimated the business and online was the only recourse.

"We couldn't print anymore. We did have a digital platform, but we didn't know how to build a business from it," she said.

Her university couldn't provide much help. "They were teaching the core skills but nothing around the business models," she said. "I thought, we should know these things when we graduate. I should have the skills, and the universities should keep us updated."

The magazine ultimately closed, but Iastrebnier continued her search for innovative online revenue strategies. In 2012, as she gathered promising cases, she began teaching workshops about what she had learned. And she began meeting like-minded people, including her future business partner, Janine Warner, who was teaching entrepreneurial journalism at the Knight

Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas. The pair began mapping online revenue strategies and innovative approaches, created a network of journalism entrepreneurs and professors interested in the subject, and founded SembraMedia. They developed an Online Directory that mapped the independent digital native media, including information about their teams, their innovations and their business models. The directory today maps more than 800 journalistic organizations.

SembraMedia continued to share best practices, digital resources and funding opportunities for media entrepreneurs. In 2017, the organization published “Inflection Point,” a study of Latin American digital news enterprises, which examined their challenges and opportunities and the diverse business models that are keeping those media afloat.

“Inflection Point”, published with support from the Omidyar Network, was the first comprehensive study of digital media entrepreneurs in Latin America, the risks they face, and whether a viable business model for independent, quality journalism has emerged in the region. One hundred digital media from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico were studied, 25 from each country.

“Inflection Point” and its case studies provided the foundation to develop a new entrepreneurial journalism curriculum. “We had a lot of theories about startups, but we hadn’t had a chance to prove they worked in this ecosystem. Now there is proof of concept. We published “Inflection Point” in 2017, and that informs every training we do.”

“We would love to have a majority of universities teaching this, not a minority, and when that happens – we know it’s not going to happen overnight – that will really be structural change in the ecosystem. That is the key.”

MIJAL IASTREBNER,
co-Founder and Director,
SembraMedia

“We always suspected that diversifying revenue was key – like instantly – but when we wrote “Inflection Point”, we proved that the media that were successful had multiple revenue sources. More than 66 percent of the media we interviewed had three or more active revenue sources.”

SembraMedia also did a deep dive into how business and entrepreneurship were being

taught in Latin American journalism schools, publishing the results in “Starting Point,” which profiled entrepreneurial journalism professors, examined the content of programmes and their impact, and made recommendations for expansion and improvements.

“We didn’t only map the universities that teach it, but we also measured the results they had, the three percent of the universities that actually teach entrepreneurial journalism,” lastrebner said. “We found out there is really a high number of new media created from these universities, and we thought, we have to build the network and create and provide materials for them to start teaching more easily.”

The Network of Professors of Entrepreneurial Journalism, which includes educators from nearly 20 countries, proved to be key. “We found that universities are not super easy about adding new things to their curricula, or changing their curricula,” she said. “The ones that are updating themselves constantly are the professors. So we really confirmed the idea that the professors will make the change.”

The network also serves as the testing and training platform for a new approach to entrepreneurship for journalism students. “We ended up developing curricula that nobody had,” lastrebner said. “For those who wanted to include it in their programme, it was already developed and had our support and credibility. We work with the network to test the curricula, before it was launched in 2019.”

The curriculum has also been strengthened by SembraMedia’s continuing work with hundreds of digital native media entrepreneurs in Latin America and the connections it provides between journalists and other social entrepreneurs. Its regional network represents more than 800 digital publications, sharing best practices and innovative ideas.

The curriculum, developed with aid from the Google News Initiative, defines the concept of journalistic entrepreneurship, with examples and case studies, introduces different funding sources, and provides a step-by-step plan for building a concept, developing viable products and implementing a business plan. It provides needed business expertise to journalists who very often enter the profession for idealistic reasons, focused more on their mission than on making money.

In addition to making the curriculum available to professors, SembraMedia offers courses directly to journalists themselves, through the SembraMedia

Virtual School, a platform of educational resources on the tools and strategies needed to venture into entrepreneurial journalism.

The school offers more than 30 courses, each about an hour-long, on a wide variety of entrepreneurial journalism topics. These include: how to develop business models; how to pitch your project to fundraisers; how to create and manage teams; communications; and creating a personal brand. The platform is also a resource for professors using the journalism curriculum; instead of assigning a chapter of a book for homework, they can ask students to review and complete the activities in one of the school's classes.

Getting the curriculum into wider use is the next challenge. In 2020, SembraMedia began two regional programmes, one for students and one for professors. Among the participants were more than 100 professors who had never taught entrepreneurial journalism but wanted to include it in their courses.

In 2021, SembraMedia began a series of national programmes for professors and students, beginning with 30 professors in Argentina, to be followed by similar initiatives elsewhere in South America. "We now have a

more diversified cohort of professors, from different provinces in Argentina. We wanted to go outside the big cities," said lastrebner.

"We provide not only training and networking, we also provide monthly newsletters to keep them updated," lastrebner said. "It's not only talking and training on how to use the curricula, it's also to keep them updated and keep them linked to the network, so they can keep teaching autonomously and in consultation with their peers."

Participation is through an open call for invitations, and the demand outweighs the openings. But those who are not enrolled in the official training



Mijal Lastrebner, Co-Founder and Director of SembraMedia

© Mijal Lastrebner

programme remain in the network and can subscribe to the newsletters and other materials. “We keep them in the loop because they might just be entering the subject, or they are just starting to teach journalism, or there are a lot of them that have participated in other programmes,” she said.

The ultimate goal is a significant increase in the training and teaching of entrepreneurial journalism in universities, lastrebner said.

“We already see how much the universities are opening their journalistic programmes, with conversations with entrepreneurs or with us,” she said. “We see there is a lot of change in the thinking there, not only in the curricula, also in the experience the student has in their training process.

“We would love to have a majority of universities teaching this, not a minority, and when that happens – we know it’s not going to happen overnight – that will really be structural change in the ecosystem. That is the key.”

There is a personal mission as well. In their media careers, both founders of SembraMedia struggled with the transformation of digital media businesses. “We both want to have people avoid that struggle, to have people avoid that lack of information to commit all those errors we committed as young entrepreneurs,” lastrebner said.

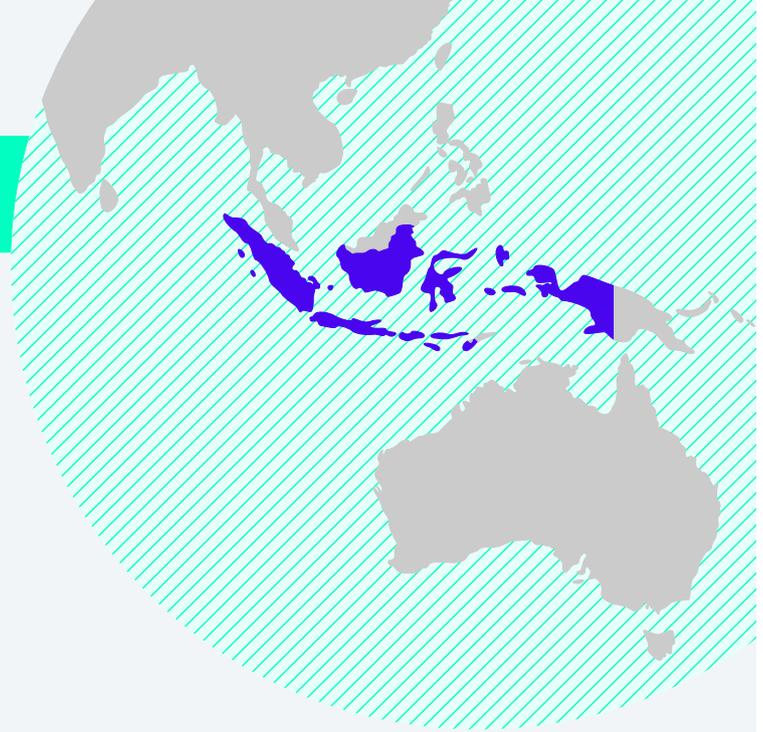
“I had a 20 people team. There were a lot of people depending on me. So all my errors, and my lack of information, really had consequences. I wanted to make sure that didn’t happen to me again, or happened to anyone else. The only way is to have information out there. Obviously the reports are a big deal, but the formal training, the mindset, that’s everything.

“Lots of journalists don’t really talk about money, and many of them are exploited. Because there is always someone who will do your work for less money, and there is not a lot of opportunity in the traditional ecosystem. You need more leaders in the industry... Because of the way the industry is, not everyone gets to have a second opportunity to study the business.”

According to SembraMedia, in 2020 the initiative provide consulting to 22 independent media projects, resulting in 33 changes to business models and 86 new revenue sources.

CHAPTER 2

Indonesia: Where the advertising business model for media still works



If your view of the media business is centered on news sources about Europe and North America – and that would not be surprising, since their large media markets dominate much of the discussion – then you are likely to believe that advertising is no longer providing adequate revenue to sustain media, and that increasing subscription revenue is the only way to future sustainability.

This view tends to dominate international discussions about the business models that will support the future of digital news businesses. It is almost as if the industry has conceded the advertising market to Google and Facebook, and instead is pursuing compensation from the platforms that built their businesses partly on the back of media content. The common belief seems to be that getting readers to pay for access is the most promising news media model of the future.

But this approach simply isn't an option for countries with much of the world's population: Indonesia, and to some extent China and India. For the most part, getting people to pay for online news doesn't work.

"The reason is, the type of content being spread in Indonesia is free content, so it is very hard if you do subscription and put up a paywall," said Winston Utomo, Founder and CEO of IDN Media, the leading media platform company for Millennials and Generation Z in Indonesia, with over 70 million monthly active users.

"And the second is the payment method. For subscriptions, you need credit cards to make recurring payments. Indonesia does not have that, we have mobile wallets. People can do one-time payments, micropayments. So we should see Indonesia more similar to China, or India, rather than the United States."

While their counterparts in Europe and North America focus on building subscription strategies, many Asian companies continue to focus on advertising revenue, despite the looming presence of the advertising behemoths Google and Facebook.

IDN Media is a prime example: it started in Utomo's bedroom as a hobby while he was working at Google. Like a lot of people, he got into it because he likes content and media. There was an audience for what he had to say.

From that humble beginning, Winston and his brother William launched IDN Media in 2014. Today, it is a media platform company employing more than 600 people, reaching tens of millions across Indonesia, with double-digit growth in revenue and profitable over three straight years, even in the midst of a pandemic. It provides not only a wide variety of compelling content, but marketing and support for the advertisers who are not only attracted by that massive audience but by those services themselves. The Utomos make it easy to advertise with IDN.

IDN provides many digital media, with their own branding, theme, and content tied together in a single platform called IDN App: news and entertainment, fashion and beauty, parenting, competitive online multiplayer electronic sports (esports), cooking, and any other topics whose audience sufficiently attracts advertisers and sponsors. Most importantly, in addition to the marketing and support services, it provides other services for those advertisers that many global media companies cannot, such as ensuring that advertisements are not placed next to disinformation or hateful content.

But it is more than just an entertainment company; its mission is nothing less than "to democratize information for every Indonesian, from Aceh to Papua, and to bring positive impacts to the society".

"Ninety percent of media content on the internet is about Jakarta," said Utomo. "So, for example, if there is an accident in Jakarta, it becomes national news. But if there is an accident outside of Jakarta, almost no one knows about it."

This is much more than just a question of regional domination, Utomo said. It has an enormous economic impact.

"For a country to become a high-income and first-world country, we need to bridge the information gap that is happening in Indonesia," he said. "It is impossible to grow a country where only people in Jakarta and other



Brothers Winston and William Utomo,
Founders of IDN Media

"For a country to become a high income country, to become a first world country, we need to bridge the information gap."

Winston Utomo,
Founder and CEO,
IDN Media, Indonesia

IDN MEDIA

few cities are educated and well informed. We need everyone in Indonesia to understand, to have the context, to be well-equipped with the right information. So that is why our mission, in IDN Media, is to democratize information. Access to quality information is a basic human right for everyone in Indonesia.”

“To make it simple, we are a one-stop media platform company,” Utomo explained. “We have news and entertainment, we have fashion and beauty, parenting, esports. We produce movies for cinema, we also license content, we have out-of-home (outdoor) advertising, and many other media as well. All under the IDN brand and technology. All in one single ecosystem, so this connects all the users in our ecosystem, and everything is plugged into our advertising system because we generate revenue from advertising.”

The key is to have a different and unique business strategy that responds to the core problems of the users. IDN provides an Indonesian version of a content aggregation platform, with the local content provided by the company and its users themselves.

For example, its flagship platform, IDN Times, is what Utomo calls “an Uber for writers,” where anyone can submit stories. The site has tens of thousands of active community members, with them generating more than 10,000 articles a month.

“In the short term, we have to explore offerings that are unique and other companies do not have,” Utomo said. “Like, for example, combining out of home (outdoor) and creative marketing platforms with our other businesses. That kind of business, many other companies will not enter. We provide a 360 solution, so anything the client needs, we can provide it. They try to coexist with the global Internet companies, while still getting a good share of the pie.”

“That is the short-term solution. But the long-term solution, which is what we are building right now, we have to create a super app for content, a one-stop media platform for all types of content. That’s the only way we can grow and become a major player, and be more sustainable.”

But if history is a guide, Google and Facebook are adept at recognizing the success of others, seizing opportunities, and creating new products and services that directly compete with the upstarts. Utomo believes there are limits to this strategy, and is betting IDN can continue to differentiate itself and attract advertising revenues.

“In the end, in many countries, especially in a growing country where the government is very ambitious, there will always be local players. That’s what I always believe. It’s healthy for the users, for the advertisers, for the ecosystem, and for everyone,” he said.

“I know it is very ambitious, but we are working on it right now. We believe that we can make it happen for the future of our beloved country, Indonesia,” he said.

To make the vision happen, IDN has been working hard to grow its ecosystem. IDN’s approach to developing new content is systematic and relies on three criteria.

“The first is, how big is the audience? If it is a small audience market, we do not want to enter. Let’s say, gardening. Yes, it has an audience, but for us, it isn’t big enough. That’s why we launched esports. Because it is a big market in Indonesia, a big user base. So the first factor is the number of potential users.”

“The second is the potential advertising revenue for the specific vertical. If the revenue is small, we don’t want to enter. We want to enter where it is sustainable to generate revenue from advertisers.”

“And the third is the competitive landscape. Is there any other player in the market? If there is, or there are too many players, we do not want to enter. For example, soccer. Because so many media have soccer categories, we don’t want to enter, even if it is a big market. So we enter other things. In esports, we are number one. Fashion and beauty, we are number one. Parenting, we are number one. So we want to enter the market where it is big, and we have a high chance of becoming number one.”

Parenting, we are number one.

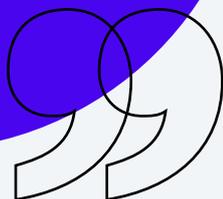
So we want to enter the market where it is big, and we have a high chance of becoming number one.”

While content is still king, user experience is also a key component of success.

IDN’s App offers a wide variety of personalization and usage incentives that keep the audience coming back and staying

“Access to quality information is a basic human right for everyone in Indonesia.”

WINSTON UTOMO,
*Founder and CEO,
IDN Media, Indonesia*



on the platform. “We still rely on Facebook and Google, don’t get me wrong. Facebook and Google are amazing platforms and partners. We really appreciate working with them. However, we try to balance the traffic referral and focus on the organic growth,” Utomo said.

For media companies wanting to follow his lead, Utomo had this to say: “For a company to be sustainable, for a company to be big and sustainable, we should focus on two things: content creation and also content distribution, and ultimately, to create a one-stop platform.”

“Pay equally important attention to content distribution compared to content creation,” he said. “I feel that many media companies focus too much on content creation, but they forget content distribution. They make very good content, but they do not put sufficient attention on content distribution.”

“For me, the best way that media companies can grow and sustain is to control content creation and content distribution. Twenty years ago, TV was the go-to media. If you look at the core competency, they control the content creation part, but they also control the distribution part, through the air rights they buy through the government. It’s very powerful. But now, everyone can say, oh, I have a media company. But when we look at the value chain, they only focus on content creation. They focus only on this thing. But media should not only be about content creation, media should also be content distribution. So I think that’s the main difference in the definition of media now compared to twenty years ago.”

CHAPTER 3

Chile: From journalism to business, in support of small and emerging news media



Miguel Paz never wanted to be on the business side of news media. A journalist at heart, he was part of the renaissance of independent media in Chile in the early 2000s. But his career took an unexpected turn.

Paz was happy as an in-depth reporter for a variety of Chilean publications. At 24, he was the founding editor of *El Periodista* magazine, then moved to a nascent Sunday paper, *La Nación Domingo*, and then to *El Mostrador*, the first digital only news website in Chile. He is the founder of *Poderopedia*, or *Powerpedia*, a website that maps who's who in business and politics. He was a Fellow at Harvard University's Nieman Foundation and the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society.

If circumstances had allowed it, Paz would likely still be a reporter today. But his career took a turn because of a chronic weakness in many media organizations, particularly in a time of economic crisis – a failure of the business side to thrive and provide the conditions needed for strong newsrooms.

"In all the places I worked, I had seen the lack of managerial ability to make things grow," said Paz, who believed he could do better.

"It wasn't my interest to go into the business side, or the technology or strategy side of the paper," he said. "I didn't choose to be an entrepreneur. It was more, I need to do this, because the business side of news organizations is terrible. And that's what happens in a lot of places and is part of the learning process."

Paz began his business-side education at *El Mostrador*, where he took charge of digital strategy and learned how to leverage data and metrics and other skills that are central to digital news transformation. But after four years, when he requested and was refused an equity interest, he moved on.

Poderopedia came next, and while it was highly influential, funding was always an issue. The directory of business and politics “was quite successful in many ways, but it was also challenging”. He added: “We made a lot of mistakes but I learned like crazy from that. One of the good outcomes from Poderopedia is that it inspired a myriad of journalism and non-profit organizations around the world to start thinking of power network analysis. That was good for journalism.”

Paz then did his Fellowship at Harvard, and remained in academia as a professor at City University of New York, where he taught data journalism, entrepreneurship and engagement journalism. He returned to Chile in 2019 with plans to start a new media enterprise, building on all his previous experience, but his plans were stymied by a lack of funding.

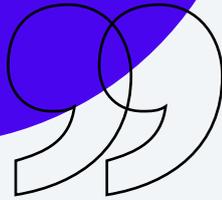
“I thought there was a good opportunity to come strong with a new organization that was managed in a 2020, 2021 kind of way,” he said. “And, of course, I knew advertising was no longer viable. If you wanted to do good and important journalism that serves your society, you needed to have an ‘umbrella’ business model, with multiple sources of funding. You can have ‘people power media’, where you get memberships, but we know it isn’t going to be the only thing. We’re also going to get some funds we can apply for, we’re going to see different micro units of economics. We can have a lot of these, let’s say four of these (revenue sources), and see how it goes. But in order to do that, I needed a lot of runway money that no one was willing to invest upfront.”

As Paz explains: “I was very clear I wouldn’t do it unless I had a good co-founder who had extensive experience in business. There was one in particular, and my pitch to him was, ‘I want to invite you to co-found an organization that has a 90 percent chance of failure, and even if we make money, it is not going to be the amount of money you are accustomed to. And there will be several times when someone in your family, or your friends and acquaintances, is going to be super mad with you about something the newsroom published, and they’re not going to believe you when you say you didn’t have anything to do with it. Do you want to go in with me?’ I didn’t want to give anyone false expectations as to what you’re getting into in launching a newsroom in Latin America.”

When he failed to raise funds, Paz was at loose ends. And once again, he relied on his experience to come up with a Plan B. And Plan B – a project to help emerging news media raise subscription revenues – turned out to be the

“If you want to have a strong newsroom, you have to be good at community and good at listening.”

MICHEL PAZ,
Founder of *Reveniu*



charm. He recognized the ability of news organizations to launch memberships and attract subscriptions was limited, and needed to be addressed.

The problem is especially acute in Latin America, where payment gateways can be difficult to use. “Latin American banking systems are made to fulfill compliance, and make the lawyers feel safe, rather than supply a good experience to their customers,” Paz

said. “It’s not like in the United States, where you go into a website and add your card and you’re done. Here, it’s like six steps.”

That simple issue has an enormous impact on anyone trying to build subscriptions online. Potential customers who intend to sign up can become frustrated and abandon the subscription process because of the complexity.

And news organizations, particularly modest ones, often don’t have adequate resources to manage the subscription side of the business, which for many has become the core source of revenue as advertising revenue disappears.

“Most of the news organizations that exist in the world, let’s say 80 percent, have no technology experience or have little tech experience,” said Paz, “or if they have tech experience they may have one or two developers in the newsrooms. And those guys are working on how to distribute and tell stories better, rather than maintaining code on a payment gateway and a subscription management platform. So that’s where the idea came from.”

With his own money, investment from Continnum HQ, a Chilean digital consulting firm, and US\$100,000 funds from the Latin American Google News Initiative, Paz founded Reveniu, a modest but promising subscription payment platform with features aimed at attracting start-up, small and medium-sized news organizations and non-profits. These are the organizations that are blossoming in many communities that have seen traditional media disappearing. Often founded by journalists intent on providing quality journalism, they hold promise for the future, if they are not overwhelmed by the management and revenue challenges of the media business.

Revenu is a software platform that allows outsourcing of subscription management while maintaining control of customer relations. It isn't just about taking payments; subscription management is about making subscriptions easy to purchase and process, retaining customers once they subscribe, and encouraging casual readers to become loyal customers.

Some news organizations – usually big ones – build their own systems, often in collaboration with existing payment platforms. This is a highly competitive field, with many platforms with varying offerings, but Revenu was designed with these new and smaller newsrooms in mind, to grow with them and providing new functionalities also available for clients in other industries.

“If you want to launch a membership platform or subscription platform right away, you can do it within five minutes with Revenu,” said Paz. If your enterprise has some in-house or external technical expertise, it is also possible to customize Revenu, to, for example, link it to databases and mailing lists and measurement systems. Revenu provides an application programming interface (API) and support for this process.

Unlike many competitors, Revenu doesn't charge a flat fee up front, but takes a percentage of each subscription payment. This pay-as-you-go approach appeals to companies without large reserves.

It also doesn't stand between the customer and the news outlet, gatekeeping the crucial data needed to better understand the audience and their habits and behaviours.

“The primary thing we're doing is providing the customer with as many metrics as we can, in a way that is understandable and actionable. We let them know who their clients are,” said Paz.

“If they just use a local payment gateway system, basically (the only information) they would get would be, someone sent some money to their bank account, with an order ID.”

Revenu, on the other hand, provides not only the name of the subscriber, the date they subscribed and the plan they subscribed for, but also the e-mail address and the page from which they subscribed. Over time, it would tell the news organization how many payments were made, the monthly recurring revenue (MRR) and the lifetime value of the customer. If a payment is rejected, the news organization would be automatically alerted



© Ricardo Jara

Miguel Paz, Founder of Revenu

and can respond, and Revenu uses its smart payment recovery engine to attempt to charge the card on file or request the subscriber to update the payment method, reducing churn.

“It is a tool that allows them to sell better and sell more easily and more automated. If you had to do this thing on your own, it’s going to cost you a lot of money, and it is going to cost you a lot of money to maintain it. Even if you have someone who can help you – the ‘I have a friend who knows WordPress kind of newsroom’ – your friend may charge you 400 dollars a month, and still Revenu is going to be cheaper. Plus, you’re going to get 24/7 support and a platform that is improving weekly. We are partners for that.”

Revenu’s strategy not only includes news media – it works for clients as diverse as yoga instructors and English teachers as well, and its strategy includes expanding the business beyond the media market to B2C companies and startups. But Paz’ background keeps him attuned to the needs of his media customers. He sees his role as taking the weight off of journalists so they can concentrate on their core mission.

“The people who want to do journalism in this era are crazy and I love them for that. It’s really hard. It’s always been hard, but now it’s harder,” Paz says. “Usually, you have a really strong-headed journalist with a vision. And that allows the project to excel and live for sheer will and determination and journalism. But everything else? That’s a problem. Do we convert journalists into programmers and business people? How can we develop the management and organizational culture? Or to attract co-founders? And with what? It’s super hard to hire technologists right now, and a good newsroom needs good technologists.”

So far, Reveniu is only available in Chile, with discussions about expansion once it grows. It remains modest: since its launch in May 2020, its turnover has grown from US\$500 a month to almost US\$100,000 a month. “Around 20 percent growth a month since we started,” Paz said.

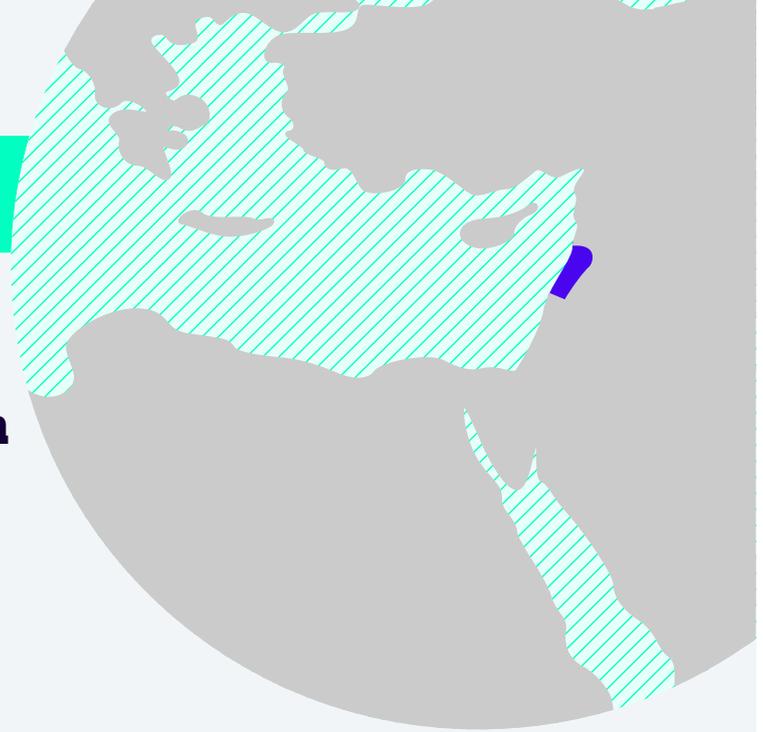
Paz describes his customer base as “new independent news organizations or older organizations in the space of independent media. Our largest client is Interferencia, one of the first that started working with us. And we have podcasts, news organizations that are niche. We have startups, large and medium non-profits, for instance Greenpeace is a client of ours in Chile. And there are the really interesting solo or collective entrepreneurs, who begins by selling things on Instagram, and they start with memberships. We try to convince larger news organizations to work with us, but they prefer to have their own inside system, or have a mix of inside and what you’d call corporate platforms.”

Viable media requires more than just great journalism; they require a strong media support system. Companies like Reveniu, start-ups themselves, are stepping into areas where journalists often don’t have the skills or the time or the inclination to devote to what is an essential part of the media business.

“We define ourselves as a subscription management platform for getting new customers and recurring revenue, so organizations can take all the time and money they would otherwise use to devote to this and use it to focus on the core of their business,” Paz said.

CHAPTER 4

Lebanon: Making a successful transition from print to digital



Is it possible for news media in Lebanon to be both financially sustainable and politically independent? L’Orient-Le Jour believes so, and is charting a “third way” between weakened independent media, and media that is strong financially but politically aligned – and doing so in a way that is worth noting elsewhere.

In the interview below, Michel Helou, Executive Director of L’Orient-Le Jour, talks about the origins and results of the company’s digital transformation strategy, which is bringing in readers and revenue, and how the French-language media company sees a future in English and – in the longer term – Arabic as well.

What are the key challenges facing independent media in Lebanon today?

It is very sad and very worrying with some small lights of hope. Lebanon used to be the capital of freedom of speech and quality newspapers and media since the 19th century, and this has collapsed over the last decade, and this collapse has accelerated over the last two years.

There is absolutely no way to sustain a print business model in Lebanon. You are completely choked by the cost of importing paper, and selling in Lebanon doesn’t make any sense anymore. It’s an extremely difficult situation. And you have foreign influenced media that is gaining ground in the country. It used to be the opposite; fifty years ago, the Arab region used to read Lebanese newspapers.

If we look at the media landscape in Lebanon, and probably the Middle East as well, there are two main components: one is the traditional media, traditional newspapers, that used to be independent, but have mostly

collapsed, and have been very weakened by the economic situation and have not been able to find a business model. This includes a lot of newspapers that used to be important institutions for our democratic process.

On the other hand, you've got a category which is politically controlled but financially much stronger, much more powerful. And it is unfortunate, because some of those are producing some good journalism, but mostly have a very strong political direction or guidance. Among those, you've got the big giants that are mainly financed by the Gulf, and they have a very clear political guidelines that they follow.

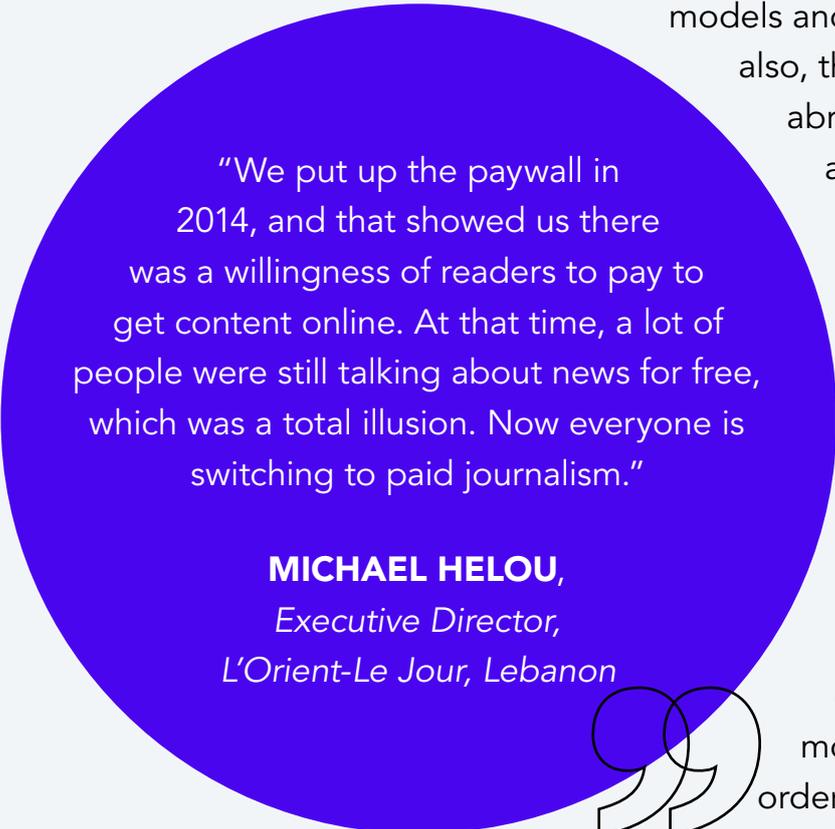
What we are trying to be is a third way between those, to be both financial sustainable and politically independent. So we don't belong to any political party, we don't get any funding from abroad, and we don't have ties or links to any political party in Lebanon. And I think this is absolutely key and is the base of our editorial proposition.

You were part of the first group you mentioned. How have you navigated the financial challenges for independent journalism you mentioned?

First, our goal was to find a proper business model in our traditional niche market, which is French, and be able to transition from print to online in the French language, given we already have a strong position. But that was jeopardized by the huge change in business

models and the digital revolution. And also, the readership shifted strongly abroad, so that we are now both a Lebanese newspaper and a diaspora newspaper on Lebanon and the Middle East. Our audience has changed massively.

Making that shift – and that was our main focus from 2014 to last year – relied on two major pillars: first improving the quality of our journalism, and second to monetize this journalism online, in order to reach sustainability.



You are now looking to expand, notably into the English language marketplace. What was the thinking to set out to serve an entirely new market for you?

We waited until we were able to prove there is a sustainable business model for quality news online before jumping into English. Why English? Because there is a lot of demand, and the supply has been weakened. The Daily Star, which used to be a reference for decades, and was the main English language newspaper in Lebanon, was independent, has been less active and stopped printing last year.

So we set up a small beta version for two years, where we were just translating some pieces and testing the waters. Late 2019, we were experiencing a very strong subscription growth in French and there were many excellent journalists available on the market. So we had both conditions that were needed: a proper business model that worked and could be replicated, and a good potential team, absolutely key for success.

So strong demand, limited supply, proper resources and a proper business model, and that would fit with our general purpose and ambition, which is to become this third way, to be the reference media outlet on Lebanon and the Middle East and in several languages. In French, in English, and, Inshallah, one day in Arabic if we are able to establish our English operations and expand into Arabic.

It took us a year to find the right people, the right managing editor, the right editors, the right translators, setting up the online platform, setting up the marketing, the campaign, the branding, etc. And we launched in October 2020.

So how does the business model work? Where does your revenue come from?

Our model is pretty simple and clear. Basically we used to rely on two pillars, like most newspapers, content and advertising. We saw both decreasing. Newsstand sales and subscriptions have been declining for the last 20 years. Advertising was very strong until 2012-2013 and then it declined sharply.

We realized in 2014 that we couldn't be sustainable in that way, so we followed what the Financial Times or the New York Times or what Le Monde were doing in the western world, which was monetizing their online content, not only by ads, because ads weren't enough to support the newsroom, but by subscriptions and reader revenue.

“A reader that subscribes is a reader that is really interested in quality journalism, versus ads that make you focus only on massive audience and not quality journalism. That is a very important business model.”

MICHAEL HELOU,
*Executive Director,
L'Orient-Le Jour,
Lebanon*



What we did is, we put up a paywall in 2014, and that was a really positive move and showed us there was a willingness from readers to pay to get content online. At that time, a lot of people were still talking about news for free, which was a total illusion. It didn't work at all, and now everyone is switching to subscription websites.

It wasn't until 2016-2017 that we really developed our digital marketing and our subscription strategy. And from then on, we set up a proper marketing team, we really worked on

the monetization part (offers, subscriber journeys and user interface/user experience, payment gateways, retention, etc.). We also put a lot of focus on the newsroom, so they would understand what the subscription model meant for their way of working.

What are the results so far?

We've experienced much stronger growth. A very important milestone was 2020, when subscriptions accounted for more than 50 percent of our revenue. Coming from close to zero in 2014, it is a radical change.

Why is it such an important change? One in terms of purpose, that business model blends better with our values and purpose than ads or other sources of funding, grants or whatever. That allows us to depend only on our readers and not on advertisers, or corporations, not on foreign funders or politicians, so it helps us reach independence. It also makes us focus on the quality of our journalism. Because a reader that subscribes is a reader that is really interested in quality journalism, versus ads that make you focus only on massive audience and not quality journalism.

The second thing I want to emphasize is our shift, in reference to the Lebanese economy. It has been a shift from an import-based business model, that relies on paper and printing and sells on the local market, towards a locally produced, export-based business model. On top of our newsroom,

our web developers as well as our marketing team are local. Besides, we've kick-started our exports thanks to online subscriptions. This is vital given the devaluation of the local currency.

That is the shift that the whole Lebanese economy will have to go through in order to survive. We were lucky, we were prepared to make that shift.

You said 50 percent of your revenue comes from subscriptions. What about the other half?

It's still a mix of the old sources of revenue, which have been reduced a lot. We still have a small share of online ads and print ads but both have become minor. Combined with partnerships (yearly deals with corporations or organizations), they account for about 22 percent. In print, sales and subscriptions still represented 29% of our revenue. However, the devaluation we've suffered in 2021 has overhauled our model and pressured print sales and ads even more.

Subscriptions live or die depending on knowing your audience. Who are your readers, and where are they?

Our French-speaking audience can be split into approximately four groups: Lebanese in Lebanon, Lebanese in the diaspora (mainly France, Canada, Belgium, Switzerland and the United States - there are a lot of French speaking Lebanese in the United States - Dubai, and then West Africa). The third group is foreigners in Lebanon: the embassies, NGOs, experts, analysts who reside in Lebanon. And then you have foreigners abroad, here we are talking mainly think tanks, academics, political science students, etc.

It is quite similar in terms of replication in English, at a much earlier stage, knowing that now we are focusing only on Lebanon coverage (and not Middle East) so we don't have the same breadth of audience, especially when we look at foreign think tanks. We know that typically, most French speaking think tanks and students read us on the Middle East, but this is not the case in English yet – though we aim to get there.

Lebanon is a small country. Has the audience outside of Lebanon surpassed that inside the country?

Absolutely. That's a key figure. In terms of general audience, For the French website, 80 percent of our audience is outside of Lebanon, 20 percent is

within Lebanon, so that's a huge shift versus the 1990s, when close to 100 percent of our (print) audience was inside of Lebanon. That's for the free audience. For the paid audience, so we're talking about subscribers and not just visitors, it is 50-50. So the Lebanese audience is slightly more loyal, more interested, and more willing to pay than the foreign audience. But still, 50 percent of our subscribers coming from abroad is a good figure.

Did you also look outside of Lebanon for ideas when you were formulating your business model?

We did a lot of intelligence, looking at what others were doing and benchmarking. So I spent quite a lot of time going to Europe, with my colleagues, mainly to France. We met the subscription people, we met the newsroom, we met the editors, we attended several conferences. This is how we learned.

But again, your market is different from those markets. A lot of media look, for example, to the New York Times, which is very successful with subscriptions, but often that doesn't translate to smaller outlets. What were the takeaways for you?

I totally agree with you about the New York Times, it is totally unique. But at the same time, everything it does is interesting to us. Besides, they are being very public about their strategy and disclose a lot of info. Their subscriptions shift was very early and very successful and that was the shift we focused on. This is the shift we try to achieve, on our very small scale, in terms of focus, in terms of revenue breakdown. This helps us answer questions like what do you focus on regarding subscriptions? What sort of analytics will you look at? What is their digital marketing strategy, their newsletter strategy? How do they organize the newsroom? – all of that is stuff that we can build on, in our own scale, to improve.

Who do you see as your competitors?

In French, if you look at the Middle East, Le Monde would be a competitor. Libération sometimes, Le Figaro sometimes, Mediapart is more specific on investigations but they cover Lebanon and the region. Le Monde is very strong in the Middle East, they have a very good team, they're the ones we want to compete with. So if you take the Sciences Po student, or the think tank guy, he'll be thinking, should I subscribe to Le Monde, should I subscribe to L'Orient-Le Jour if I want to follow the Middle East?

On Lebanon specifically we don't have direct French-language competition. But not having competition doesn't guarantee your success, you can have no competition and still fail if you are not able to convince your reader to subscribe. So, in the end, our competition could be any other source of news, or any other platform, that can capture people's brain time, people's attention. So content on Facebook, or Instagram or Snapchat is also competition to us. Because the Lebanese are multilingual, other news websites in Arabic or English are also competition. We need to prove that spending five minutes a day on L'Orient-Le Jour is time well spent because of the quality of the content. And that competition is the biggest for all media outlets out there.

How do you differentiate yourself? How do you convince the reader to come to you and spend their money with you?

On content, it is depth we're going to give, not only on the Middle East but also on Lebanon, and that clearly nobody has the depth in French. Since 2019, Lebanese politics has been very intense, so a lot of people have been focused on Lebanon. The second thing is our standards: we try to abide by the highest standards for journalism – with a strong focus on facts. Third is our approach and our presence here in Beirut. It is different to write from Beirut than from a newsroom based in Paris, New York, Washington DC or Dubai. This is also true about our regional coverage: on the Syrian war for instance, one of our differentiators was trying to give a voice to those who live here. We did a lot of direct contact, and let the Syrians talk about the war, and I think this is something very important that western media probably didn't do as much as we do.

Then we have tried to develop a whole array of products. We are still limited when compared to the big newsrooms, but we try to focus on providing a good reader experience, very clear newsletters, very decent apps. We revamped our website completely. In a nutshell, it is about focusing on our niche, on what we are good at – i.e. the Middle East and Lebanon – and trying to convince people to subscribe.

These issues are even more pronounced in the English language market. Can you talk about your thinking? Why do you see opportunities here?

The strategy is clearly choosing a niche, winning the niche and moving upwards if it works. So the first niche is Lebanese news, in English, focusing

on politics, society and the economy. Why do we think it can work? Basically because we believe the supply of news does not match the demand. There is a huge need. So we want to be the top ones on that, and target those four groups of people – Lebanese in Lebanon, Lebanese abroad, foreigners in Lebanon, foreigners abroad. Our differentiating factor will be, number one, the depth of our analysis, And two, our credibility. We are Lebanese, and I think people want to read Lebanese outlets, and not just foreign ones, especially if politically-oriented ones. We don't have any political guidance, we've got real newsroom independence that the others probably don't have. Those will be our two differentiating factors.

In terms of competition, you have several new outlets that are doing a great job. None of them are doing exactly what we do, but here are some: Now Lebanon, Megaphone (specialized on social media/visual production), Daraj, Raseef22, etc.

If we look at the foreign newspapers, the strongest in English is The National, which has a substantial Lebanon team. Overall, their coverage is too scattered to really become competition to us. But if we start covering the Middle East, and that is a long-term strategy for us in English, it will be another game for us.

Has the newsroom expanded during this transformation since 2015 or has it contracted like a lot of companies?

We have strengthened it clearly, but in terms of numbers, we are approximately the same in French. That's without the L'Orient Today English staff; if we include them we've seriously expanded.

What are the big lessons learned from this journey? What advice would you have for others looking to make the digital transition in similar size markets?

I think the first thing to do is to define precisely your value proposition and understanding your audience. Product-market fit is essential in order to successfully monetize your product.

Journalism today is largely driven by purpose. Hence the necessity to clarify your purpose in order to have a convincing value proposition. What is your purpose as a media organization? It's not just about making money, it's about shared values, it's about democracy, accountability, freedom of speech.

The second thing is, look at your media organization as a business, not just as a newspaper, or as a political influence tool. In Lebanon it was the opposite – it was often about using a media’s influence to get funding from politicians or foreign powers, which is harmful for journalism. Regarding the business perspectives, I think in most of the cases, monetization will be based more on readers than advertising. Advertising has suffered a lot, and it will take years for the Lebanese economy to recover. In order to generate reader revenue, you need to be number one in your niche, and focus on monetization.

Then there are other business models to be explored, each one of us will have to invent its own. That’s also the beauty of this industry.

CHAPTER 5

Europe and Africa: Advocacy comes in all shapes and sizes



At first glance, the European Publishers Council and the Zambian Free Press Initiative have little in common. One represents some of the world's biggest publishers, and is concerned with global issues including copyright, digital privacy and competition from the big platforms. The other defends journalists and publications in a sparsely populated country and focuses on local issues like distribution of government advertising and tax relief.

But they do align, in fact, when it comes to their underlying mission: creating a better environment for sustainable independent news media to carry out their essential and central roles in their societies.

News media are businesses, but are unlike other businesses. They provide news and information that citizens need to make informed decisions, as well as acting as a watchdog against corruption and incompetence. Economic and social development is impossible without the information they provide. But this role is sometimes unappreciated, misunderstood, or even opposed by those who would prefer to avoid scrutiny.

Advocacy on behalf of independent news media is needed both to ensure media can carry out this role without impediment, and to remind societies of its importance. As the European Publishers Council (EPC) and the Free Press Initiative (FPI) illustrate, advocates come in all shapes and sizes.

The Free Press Initiative is a non-profit formed in 2018 by veteran journalist Joan Chirwa to promote press freedom and professionalism in Zambia. The organization is dedicated to strengthening journalistic standards, ethical reporting, responsible journalism and to increase the professionalism of the sector. But with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the media industry,

the organization found itself taking on a bigger advocacy role to find relief for publishers and journalists.

“FPI was inspired by my realization that there were quite a number of lapses in the Zambian media industry, where a number of

people were always talking about dwindling professionalism,” said Chirwa. “I told myself, I’m out of active practice, but I didn’t want to join the bandwagon of people who just sit and criticize what is going on. I thought it would be best to come up with a pro-active way of dealing with certain issues that confront the Zambian media industry. I came up with an organization that can benefit the entire industry, not just a few individuals.”

The European Publishers Council groups the Chairs and CEOs of leading European media corporations spanning newspaper, magazine, book, journal, internet and online database publishers, and radio and TV broadcasting. Its members list reads like a Who’s Who of European media: Mathias Döpfner of Axel-Springer, Rebekah Brooks of News UK, Anders Eriksson of Bonnier, Natalia Gamero del Castillo of Condé Nast, Stefan von Holtzbrinck of Holtzbrinck, Kristin Skogen Lund of Schibsted, Michael Ringier of Ringier, Kevin Beatty of DMG Media, and 19 others, chaired by Christian Van Thillo, owner of DPG Media with newspapers, magazines and TV across Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.



Free Press Initiative Founder Joan Chirwa (center left) presents FPI’s position paper on COVID-19 impact to then Information Minister Dora Siliya



Members of the EPC meeting with the President and Members of the European Commission

Founded in 1991, the EPC has lobbied on over 250 different legislative proposals and other directives affecting the business of the media industry. It largely focuses on lobbying and advocacy at the European Commission and the European Parliament.

“I think the group itself is pretty unique,” said Angela Mills Wade, Executive Director of the EPC. “It’s unusual in that very, very senior people are prepared to come together to look at what’s important to them in terms of their business development, where they see their businesses going in the future, and what needs to be done in terms of regulation, or not to be regulated, to ensure their success.

“I would say the EPC, unlike many of the trade associations, is very business led. The whole concept is around the business priorities, what is driving the business, what is hindering their development, whereas the associations tend to be very legal and regulation led. But of course the two come together.”

Like the Free Press Initiative, it also defends the right for a free press, and more particularly, “a necessity for the sustainability of a free and pluralistic press sector in Europe.”

Obviously, the issues facing the press in Zambia and in Europe are quite different. But the techniques the two organizations use to advance the various causes they promote are similar, even if the scale is not.

In Zambia, as in many countries in Africa, there are several laws – criminal defamation, state security, contempt of court and sedition – that inhibit the freedom of journalists to practice without fear of prosecution and arrest. The threat of jail or closures – and in a few cases, closures themselves – can lead to self-censorship and reduce legitimate criticism.

There are also financial pressures to keep the press in line. That was a serious consideration for the publishers when the government launched a COVID relief loan fund. The publishers found the application process problematic, and feared the funds would come with conditions.

“It becomes difficult for them to apply for the funds, because they don’t want to compromise editorial independence,” said Chirwa. “It’s a different story when you talk about a government in a developed country, that understands media freedoms and the importance of having them operate independently. The challenge was, if we get this money, we might be tied to the government. They might begin to dictate what they want to talk about.”

Instead, FPI advocated for a more equitable and transparent distribution of government advertising – significant revenue as the government is the largest advertiser in the country, but which was going wholly to government-supported media. Though government advertising can also be used to influence positive coverage, Chirwa believes this is mitigated because it is a commercial transaction in which both sides benefit, not just a handout.

“So, for example, one particular news organization has been getting some advertising from the Electoral Commission of Zambia. They’re both benefitting from it. Even if the advertising is coming, they have not changed their line of reporting, they are still one of the critical newspapers that are trying to keep the government in check and accountable for every decision that is made that affects the Zambian people,” Chirwa said.

The lobbying effort for more equitable advertising distribution succeeded in getting some of this advertising placed in private media – Chirwa estimates about 20 percent – for the first time.

“That is one thing at least,” said Chirwa. “Our lobbying and our position paper has been taken on, and the government has acted on it, and did something the media institutions we spoke to had wanted. It’s still not at a level of where we want it to be, but maybe it is a positive step toward something better coming ahead. It never happened before but it is slowly happening, so maybe we will get to a level where we will see a lot more government advertising in the private media organizations.”

For the EPC, the goal from its inception was mostly to reduce regulation of the media sector. But more recently, it has taken on the task of lobbying for new legislation, aimed primarily at protecting publishers’ rights and ensuring fair competition with the market dominating distribution platforms like Google and Facebook. In its entire history, it has backed new laws just three times – for the EU copyright directive, which gives news publishers the right to claim revenues for online use of their material, to align value added taxes on digital subscriptions to be aligned with VAT deductions in print, and now on competition policy, with the digital markets act and digital services act, which aim to level the playing field for fair and open digital markets.

More frequently, the EPC focus its effort on reducing regulations on news media, for instance to provide a journalistic exemption from the data protection directive, without which journalists would have been hindered in collecting information for legitimate reporting purposes.

Despite their differences, there are several things that work similarly for media advocates in Lusaka and in Brussels.

The first is solidarity, with agreement and consensus among the various media companies working toward a common goal. This can be more difficult than it appears. By definition, these are highly competitive organizations, fiercely individual, and getting them to work together requires an understanding there are some areas where they cannot go it alone.

Before approaching the government for COVID relief in Zambia, the Free Press Initiative brought together 40 media organizations in an effort to illustrate the problems posed by COVID and to suggest relief measures. The goal was to have a wide representation from traditional media that was hit by an economic downturn worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The group demonstrated the pandemic reduced everything from newspaper copy sales to advertising revenues to staff levels, as well as to increased government requests for free air time and advertising to communicate its response to the pandemic. This information, collected in a survey of Zambian media, was the foundation of the position paper that helped convince the authorities to begin providing advertising to the private media.

“I would say it is one of the best projects we have done, because a lot of them spoke openly, and they were speaking the same language,” said Chirwa.

For the EPC, its membership is its obvious strength; it insists that the Chair or CEO take part in its annual meeting and they cannot delegate this responsibility. This high-level representation provides them with the access they need to ensure their voice is heard, not only among the staff at the European Commission and with Members of the European Parliament, but even higher.

“I think it means that you can be more effective and can act also at a very senior level in the regulatory fields,” said Mills Wade. “And though I don’t go off and meet Prime Ministers and Ministers all the time, they (the members) do. And they go with an understanding of what the EPC priorities are.”

Associated with industry solidarity is the importance of working in coalitions with other advocacy organizations, both Chirwa and Mills Wade said. Change usually doesn’t occur when one organization goes it alone. As with media companies themselves, it is often difficult to find consensus among organizations that work for common goals but compete for funding, membership, attention and prestige. But combining voices is more effective than single voices.



“We are open to work with other organizations. ... I would say be open to working in coalitions and alliances because you can achieve a lot that way.”

ANGELA MILLS WADE,
*Executive Director,
European Publishers Council*

For FPI, that meant conducting its survey and position paper with the support of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). For local organizations, working with international partners alerts authorities that the world is watching, which can be an effective lever.

For the EPC, much of Mills Wade’s daily work involves meeting not only with officials and politicians but with other organizations representing news media as well as those representing other media as well. The goal is to find common positions and work in tandem to increase the effectiveness of the message.

“I see that as a very important role, we are active in developing a position that is shared by others. Not telling people what to do, but being a source of influence and inspiration in a broader coalition,” she said.

“We are open to work with other organizations. We reach out to lots of different people and work with the other creative industries, the music industry, broadcasting, film, and we learn a lot from each other. And the same on the advertising side. My advice is to be open to working in coalitions and alliances because you can achieve a lot that way.”

Both organizations are also heavily dependent on research to support their positions, like the survey mentioned above. Chirwa hopes to parlay the findings to support other forms of policy change. For example, the impact of a poor exchange rate on the price of imported newsprint and ink, which is exacerbated by taxes on these products. Research that shows the negative impact of these taxes on the viability of the sector supports the argument for tax reductions.

“For Zambia, cash handouts do not work,” Chirwa said. “We would rather see policy changes which would target certain taxes that are a drain on media organizations. That is one thing that would really work quite well, because it is something that is going to benefit all and not only the private sector. I think, for me, much more policy change would be an appropriate intervention for Zambia.”

For the EPC, the complexity of data privacy, copyright and competition issues requires research to measure the impact – intentional or not – on media businesses. This comes both from the members themselves and from outside experts who supplement the companies’ experiences with their own research.

“It is an advantage to have the market leading insights from the members directly as to what’s happening,” said Mills Wade. “I can bring that to the legislators and say, these are the developments, and you need to approach the regulation this way or that way, rather than saying, no, we don’t like this or do it this way, on the basis of the law. Over the years, it has been very appreciated by the civil servants and the politicians to have those insights, because when they are crafting regulations, they will be more relevant.”

“Instead of just staying, we want this because it will help us, we are actually able to give a much fuller picture of what’s happening in the market, and why it is important for the future sustainability and viability of media. That helps them craft their legislation in a way that is more targeted. And more realistic.”

For Chirwa, advocacy, no matter at what level, all comes down to keeping your eye on the big picture: “We are looking at how we can still make journalism in mainstream media an attractive industry and still something people can rely on. So we keep telling them, look, there is work that needs to be done, but all is not lost.”

“We are looking at how we can still make journalism in mainstream media an attractive industry and still something people can rely on. There is work that needs to be done, but all is not lost.”

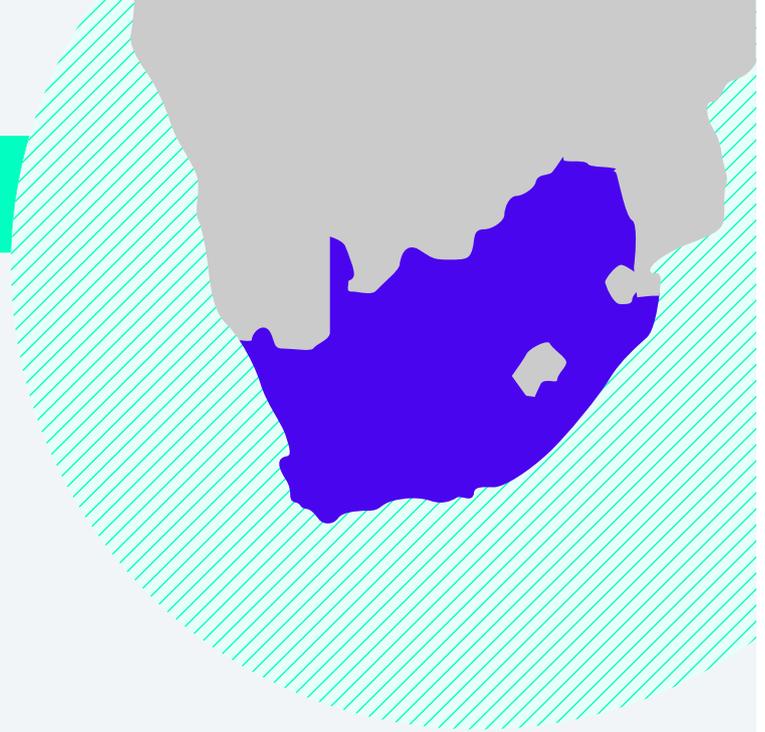
JOAN CHIRWA,

*Founder, Free Press Initiative,
Zambia*



CHAPTER 6

South Africa: Community media take on new role



Around Port Shepstone in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province in South Africa, Ugu Youth Radio is deeply embedded in the community, not only broadcasting but also providing help to people in many other ways. It even sometimes helps to pay for funerals.

“In our community, maybe 60 percent of the people are in need,” said Siyabonga Mkhungo, Chief Executive Officer of Ugu Youth Radio. “You may find there is a family member that has passed away in this area. Then the radio station will conduct the full funeral services, for those family members.”

Community radio stations in South Africa can be assessed in terms of what the term “community” implies. Since they first emerged at the end of the apartheid era in the 1990s, almost 280 community stations have blossomed, becoming a vibrant part of the media landscape.

Their mission is to increase cultural and linguistic diversity in media across the country and provide local information and services to those who have little resources and no other independent sources of news. But they also often do more – from conducting activities for youth and the elderly, to fundraising for stipends and uniforms to students, to fixing houses, to distributing blankets, to recognizing and honouring community leadership, and even to paying for funerals.

“What is important for me is the understanding of community,” said Mpho Mhlongo, CEO of Jozi FM in Johannesburg. “If you do not understand what community radio is, or is supposed to be, if you don’t have a vision, it just becomes another radio station. You need to love to see development happen. We need to separate ourselves from commercial radio, we are here

“If you do not understand what community radio is, or is supposed to be, if you don’t have a vision, it just becomes another radio station. You need to love to see development happen. If you have that as a foundation, you are in the right place.”

MPHO MHLONGO,
CEO, Jozi FM in Johannesburg



for development. If you have that as a foundation, you are in the right place.”

South African community media have a strong support network, but they, like all media, are facing grave economic challenges. There are some that are self-sustainable, like Jozi FM, which competes with commercial radio in both size of audience and revenue, or Radio Riverside in the Northern Cape

Province, whose community activities have helped generate loyalty resulting in 90 percent listenership in its coverage area. But it isn’t easy.

“How do we sustain ourselves? In short, we have diversified income streams from advertising, programme sponsorships, on- and off-air activities, and more recently, skills development training,” said Thabang Pusoyabone, Manager of Radio Riverside and Secretary General of the National Community Radio Forum of South Africa. “We also apply for grants, to ensure that some of the projects we do are funded projects. The last one we did was with the Lottery, where we did environmental support and cleaned the townships, and the Lottery supported that project.”

Most community radios also rely in part on unpaid volunteers who receive at best a transport stipend. This reduces costs and enhances involvement, but leads to a high turnover in staffing, a need for continued skills training, and in some cases volunteers using their participation to promote themselves or external institutions like their church. It’s a complex aspect of the business model.

Many stations are dependent on outside sources of income – sometimes revenue provided from the other business interests of their founders, or from donations or grants, and often from the South African Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), an organization set up by the country’s parliament to support the sector, with safeguards to guarantee independence. The MDDA disburses funds to community media, with two-thirds of its budget coming through a mandatory levy on the country’s commercial broadcasters,

which are assessed 0.2 percent of their annual turnover for this purpose. The government and investments provide the rest. The MDDA's funds once also included voluntary contributions from print media, but that ended in 2014 because of the sector's own sustainability challenges, among other issues.

"The MDDA is geared towards developing the community and small commercial media, owned, managed and controlled by local and indigenous

cultural groups, thus encouraging the use of indigenous languages," said Zukiswa Potye, CEO of the agency. "The people of South Africa must receive information, news and content in the languages they use and understand."

"We do this by providing grants to qualifying start-ups and existing small commercial and community media that are struggling to sustain," she said. "Today South Africa has more than 270 licensed community radio stations, over 5 community television stations and more than 200 independent publishers, from almost nothing pre-democracy. We have supported 160 community radios, 4 televisions and over 100 publishers. Most of the beneficiaries have been funded more than once, twice and up to five times, owing to the level of sustainability."

With an annual disbursement budget of around 50 million Rand (3.7 million US dollars), and 70 to 80 applications a year, the grants provided by the MDDA are modest and cannot be provided to all who ask. The funding decisions are based on a set of criteria that include the business plan, the governance of the organization, and past performance including if the station has already received funding.

"It can't be one size fits all," Potye said. "If it's a start up, we must set you up,



Zukiswa Potye, Chief Executive, Media Development and Diversity Agency

© Zukiswa Potye

so we will pay for your transmission cost connection, and then we must buy you broadcasting equipment and set you up as a station, so it will take quite a lot. But people come back because of non-viability. There are areas we haven't touched, given the lack of sustainability in the beneficiaries we currently have. So we've seen that, over time, we are funding the same people."

Without such ongoing support, many of these small community broadcasters would fail, and the substantial investments in equipment, training and personnel would be lost. But having to re-invest in the same media enterprises reduces the MDDA's ability to aid new community media, and prevents new voices from emerging.

"There are (stations) in poor provinces that need assistance. But they can't qualify because they owe tax, or they are not compliant for this or that," said Potye. "So my focus is to say, those that we are not reaching because of non-compliance, what is happening there, what is their story, because they can't be viable if they cannot access any other help."

At the same time, those already funded also need support if they are to move toward sustainability, what Potye refers to "a period of handholding, to establish a sustainability process where we can graduate these entities into self-sustainability."

This focus on viability has led the agency to a new approach to define and examine the factors contributing to it, and to emphasize the underlying business factors of community media. But in this environment, the definition of viability is sometimes different from pure self-sustainability, and may include intangible value such as the use of volunteer staffing, or the value of subsidies when the market cannot provide adequate support, to continue the important benefits that independent community media brings to societies.

"When we look at sustainability, we are not only looking at it from the financial, there is social sustainability as well," Potye said.

"We say as a mantra for sustainability that we are trying to build resilience, which means a socially independent, economically independent, financially independent and self-sufficient sector," she said.

"Once we've established a radio station, it is supposed to then be able at least to generate some revenue through the economic activities happening in their communities, or through government or from state entities," she said.

The MDDA is working to identify the conditions that strengthen sustainability

“We say as a mantra for sustainability that we are trying to build resilience, which means a socially independent, economically independent, financially independent and self-sufficient sector.”

ZUKISWA POTYE,
*CEO, South African Media
Development and Diversity
Agency*



of community radio stations, and is doing so through a research project that will examine six main factors.

The first is technology, digital innovation and signal distribution, which is an enormous cost for the broadcasters, most of whom broadcast through the state-owned communications network Sentech. “We are beginning to say it is unaffordable,” said Potye. “At the moment the bill is sitting around 80 million Rand (5.9 million US dollars) in terms

of the debts to that entity, mostly by our beneficiaries. So we must deal with that.”

The second factor is the importance of good corporate governance and management in a station’s ability to function efficiently. “The Board and the management need to understand their different roles and responsibilities, be able to comply with all South African laws that apply. If you struggle with that, you will not be able to do business with anyone.”

Content generation, and the professional skills and capacity needed to create content that people want and need, is the third factor to be examined. “Compelling and premium content will take centre stage in ensuring the sector is resilient, future forward and is sustainable,” Potye said. “Because that content should compel investors and advertisers and audiences to go back and listen to a station.”

Transformation of the print media sector is also included in the project, as community media is more than just the broadcasters, and community print faces the same digital transformation challenges as commercial print media. While the original design of the MDDA was for commercial publishers to provide support for the sector voluntarily, they have been unable to contribute, and cannot be compelled to do so under South Africa’s press freedom laws. Funding for this transformation is an issue, as it is elsewhere.

The fifth factor is consolidation of government support. Though the MDDA is the main conduit providing funds for the sector, there are other potential sources of funding, including government agencies like the Post Office Bank providing low interest loans to media that meet certain criteria. “We are saying, beyond the grant we get from government, which is 33 or 34 percent of our total budget, what can other government departments do?” Potye said.

The last element is audience measurement, which is an obstacle for the small media companies. “We have not paid particular attention in terms of putting resources into that process,” Potye explained. “The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa is paid for by the commercial broadcasters, and we are beginning to say, should we join them or look at our own?”

“So these are the factors we are going to look at, in terms of assisting the sector with viability,” she said.

The broadcasters themselves echo Potye’s assessment of what leads to strong community media.

“I think the planning is the most important thing,” said Thabang Pusoyabone of Radio Riverside. “If everyone understands the vision and the plan, and they understand their roles, you are able to measure the progress going forward. There can be many things that can contribute to the growth and sustainability of a radio station, but I think the primary thing must be good plans and a good foundation.”

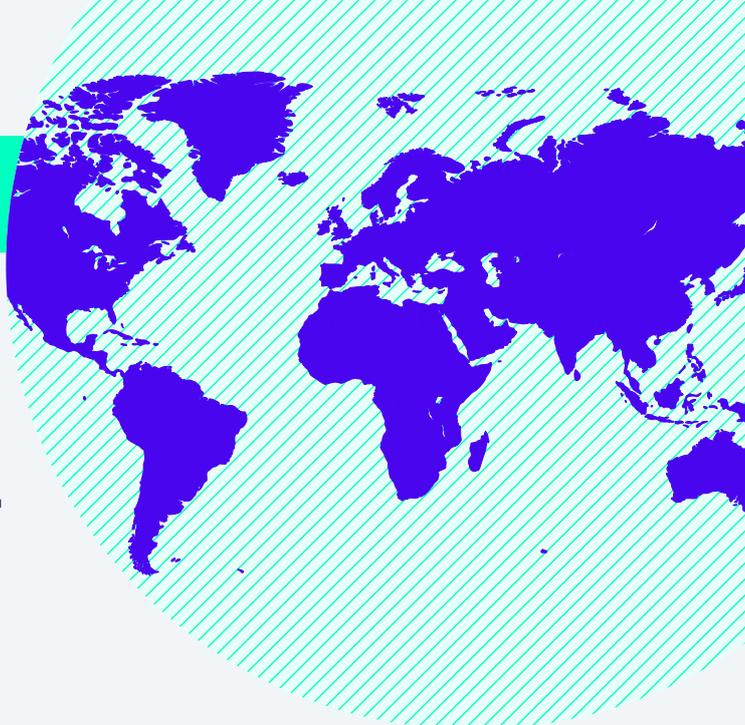
“I think what should be added to that is execution,” said Mpho Mhlongo of Jozi FM. “You know there is nothing more beautiful than having a beautiful plan, but if you cannot put it into action, it just becomes a piece of paper.”

He added that intangible factors are also important.

“Your Board of Directors really need to be visionaries,” he said. “At Jozi FM, our board members come from NGOs in the society, from LGBTI, HIV, women, youth, people who are on the ground in terms of development of our society. They know what the issues are. These are people who work for the community, with the community. It becomes easy for them to give direction and support to the radio station, because they will know the vision. And there is also a need for passion.”

CHAPTER 7

Global: Protecting the independence of public service media



By definition, public media tends, at least in part, to be funded by the public, either through a direct licence fee or by some government subvention. Many have mixed funding models, with some advertising funding combined with public funding – and they are also affected by the current decline in advertising revenue.

In addition, government support can be a two-edged sword, because it makes public media vulnerable to pressure that threatens their editorial independence, especially when authoritarianism and populism are on the rise.

Sally-Ann Wilson, the CEO of the Public Media Alliance, says that governments that interfere with editorial independence do so because they believe having a controlled media source increases their power. But, she says, governments actually dilute their power when they try to control the message. The loss of independence comes with a loss of credibility and public trust.

State capture of public interest media has been a long-term problem dating back to colonial or communist control of the media, where journalists at public broadcasters often struggle with outside interference. But the problem is now seen across countries where editorial autonomy had once been accepted with some exceptions.

Public broadcasters are often the main source of critical information in times of crisis, and they demonstrated their value during the COVID-19 pandemic. But some of those same broadcasters have come under pressure when they turned their attention to the flawed performance of governments in the crisis. Far too often, governments also used the crisis to dictate what information could and could not be broadcast, circumscribing legitimate debate and reporting on policy measures and pandemic-related contracts and public spending.

In the interview below, Wilson talks about the growing challenges, and how public media are combatting capture, protecting their resources and facing the future.

What is the Public Media Alliance, who are your members, and what is your mission?

The Public Media Alliance, or PMA as its better known, is the largest global association of public media organizations, so it is substantially public broadcasters. We have many members from the giants of public media such as the BBC, ZDF in Germany, ABC Australia, CBC/Radio-Canada, and very many small national broadcasters. It sits at around 100 members.

Public media can be diverse, and there is a diversity of governance and funding mechanisms. Although these broadcasters are not always ad-free, they're increasingly multi-platform. We think that's a good thing, because it carries the old standards of public broadcasting into this new digital era as multi-platform public media. Independence, accuracy, transparency and accountability are all really clear indicators of public media.

The focus of our work in recent years is the concern that growing authoritarianism and populism has meant that a lot of public media organizations have become captured, either by their own governments or by third party actors, and are no longer what public media should be, which is independent.

Is it part of your mission to ensure that your members have editorial independence?

Yes, it's part of our mission to support our members to be independent. They get plenty of reminders through their contact with us. They are, by and large, national broadcasters, so it is complex. We know that very often a public service broadcaster can change overnight in an election, but then it can change back again. And yet the same journalists, the same editors work there. Public media underpins democracy, and cutting them off (from membership, if they lose independence) would not always be helpful. We've built relationships with many countries and many journalists and editorial staff and managerial staff over the years, and we know the ones we can invest in, even if it means keeping them as members, and working quietly with them to support them and the values of public media when their independence is threatened.

“A gold standard [for public media] would be independent, funded at least in part by the public it serves, but with very clear mechanisms of governance and funding that ensures that it is editorially independent and its journalists are trained to be accurate and transparent.”



SALLY-ANN WILSON,
CEO, *The Public Media Alliance*

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One of our goals at present is to scope public media worldwide. So, we are investigating every broadcaster that calls itself a public broadcaster or public media organization. Hopefully by the end of 2021 we will be looking at not only having details of each organization on our website, but we will note where they sit in terms of standards.

A gold standard would be independent, funded at least in part by the public it serves, but with very clear mechanisms of governance and funding that ensure that it is editorially independent and its journalists are trained to be accurate and transparent.

What are the biggest challenges facing public interest media? Do they vary widely from country to country, or is there a general trend?

We've seen a change in global geopolitics, which means there has been a growth in authoritarianism and populism, and both of those impact public media. There seems to be a trend for governments to believe that if they control public media, cutting off its independence, that will give them some power.

I think that's erroneous, because actually citizens are increasingly aware of media literacy issues and they want, as we've seen throughout the COVID epidemic, public media to be independent. Where public media is independent, it is trusted as the main source of information. Public media that is independent is also essential for countering dis- and misinformation.

The biggest threat to public media remains state capture. This tends to start with moves to starve it of funding, of using the argument that the commercial competitors say it is too rich and has too many advantages. Our greatest concern, and why we really focus on advocacy, is that there is a critical lack of political and public understanding of what public media is and what it should and could be in terms of its role in underpinning informed democracy.

That's a challenge, as a lot of governments think public media belongs to them because they get government funding. When you talk about advocacy, what is effective in the face of this, how do you combat the trend you mentioned toward public media capture?

In some cases that is obviously difficult, which isn't to say we don't try. We hold a seat on the newly founded Consultative Network of the Media Freedom Coalition. This was launched in the UK in 2019 in collaboration with the Canadian government. It has grown and now has 48 signatory states, and I know others have recently applied. So, it is growing. There is some prestige for states to be part of the Media Freedom Coalition, which means they sign a pledge to support media freedom. The PMA having a seat, as one of 18 organizations in the Consultative Network, means we can work and make a case to have (violators) expelled.

PMA also established and provides support to the Global Task Force for public media, which comprise eight CEOs of the biggest public media organisations worldwide. Again, we support them to put out statements and to call-out threats to public media.

On the local level, particularly in the developing world, what would be the best practices for public interest media and their journalists? Do you have recommendations on the local level about what they can do to protect their independence while protecting their funding?

Increasingly, I don't distinguish (between developing and developed countries), because what we've seen for many years in the developing world, we are now seeing in parts of Europe and worldwide. So that's changed. There has been a leveling down rather leveling up for public media and for journalism globally.

PMA has worked with local journalists in numerous locations to produce social media guidelines for public media journalists. These train and guide them in social media use – in the same way you have editorial standards in your newsroom, we promote editorial standards and editorial guidelines on social

media platforms. We also encourage new ideas about media viability. The CEOs have direct contact with us when they have difficulties, and we support them when and where we can.

We don't have a "kit" about how to avoid media capture, because it is complex and contexts vary enormously. Maybe that is something we should consider. But we work with all of them (public media organizations) independently, look at the context, look at the best ways for working in each case. We're often called into parliaments to make recommendations and submissions, and bringing that international viewpoint can be really important.

We support things like better visibility for public media. Politicians and citizens need to better understand what it is that public media does. It is not Netflix. Netflix will not tell you when your school is closed. Or when a tree is down across the river. So, we adapt that sort of information for local context. We say to our members, go out and meet people. Get out, talk to people, have village hall meetings. Talk about what you do, be visible, talk about misinformation and disinformation. Certainly promote fact-checking, because accuracy is critical. Encourage debate, and work at moderating the language of debate and not making it hostile. We've done quite a lot of work with media on peace building as well, and we have held training sessions around that topic worldwide.

We always promote the best ideas and innovations in public media, the idea of sharing really good ideas is something we always try to do, and we've seen some fabulous ideas over the years.

The latest one is C-site by Thai PBS in Thailand. They started off with the tag, "TV you can trust", and it's about trust and integrity. I think it is those things in public media that are too often overlooked and forgotten.

Lots of initiatives come out of crises, emergencies and disasters. The first person to first use what we call 360 degree reporting (immersive reporting)

was a young woman named Marion Warnica, who was trapped in the Fort McMurray fires in 2016 in Canada. She did a 24-hour Twitter essay with little films



in it, and we promoted her work worldwide as it was such a great on the spot response to the crisis and one that could be used elsewhere.

So we are always looking for those innovations, and we are always keen to promote them. I think it is important that it's recognized that public media innovates.

I am still a passionate believer in public media and its principles. It isn't old, it's new, it works.

Because of the disruption of media business models in the digital environment, some governments are now looking to subsidize independent commercial media – for example, the Canadian tax credits and the Facebook law in Australia. Do you think that points to a future of public interest media that doesn't include large, centralized institutions like the BBC or the CBC? Are they dinosaurs in some sense?

I don't think they're dinosaurs, but they have to innovate and change. New Zealand at the moment, under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, are completing a review of their media landscape, and making sure they have a creative industry that is both publicly funded and adheres to the core principles of public media. So they are looking to pull in TVNZ, which isn't public, New Zealand On Air, which is the funding mechanism, and RNZ, which is Radio New Zealand, to a whole new public media entity.

Again, in Spain, RTVE announced they would use a tax on the global digital giants to better fund their public media. So I think we will see changes in how public media is funded there. I hope governments do look at taking from some of the sources of misinformation. I think that may be a way of addressing the problems within Facebook, Twitter and Google, take some of the profits from that to really invest in public media.

Public media must evolve with the times, we can see this as they rush to adapt to growing SVOD (subscription video on demand) markets. But whatever this evolution is, it mustn't come at the expense of losing their core principles and especially those that maintain their independence and their direct link to the public.

I think our best chance of stopping state capture is really upping our advocacy, and we would really like to get funding for this. We are constantly seeking funding to better advocate for public media and what it can be. When it goes wrong, public support lessens, but when it works, it's really, really, good.

CHAPTER 8

Brazil: Fact-checking, a core skill of news media, emerges as a business strategy



Before there was the term ‘fake news’ and social media made it easy to spread manipulated content and outright lies, many traditional news media outlets were already employing the fact-checking skills that expose propaganda, falsehoods and even honest errors.

Fact-checking is in the DNA of professional standards and some media companies, like Agência Lupa in Brazil, have built an entire business on it, providing fact-checking services for numerous clients, and also teaching citizens to better scrutinize their news. Others are making fact-checking a regular feature as a response to audience desires – fact-checking columns and stories are increasingly popular and the need is growing. To share practices and uphold standards, fact-checkers are coming together in organizations like the International Fact-Checking Network, which, among other services, certifies fact-checking organizations and provides guidance to ensure the fact-checkers provide honest accounts and aren’t themselves manipulated by those who weaponize information.

Often, these initiatives start small. Agencia Lupa, for instance, began after its founder, Cristina Tardaguila, wrote a fact-checking blog for O Globo during the 2014 presidential election in Brazil, when she was associate director of politics at the newspaper. But the fact-checking blog only ran for about three months, and ended with the election. As 2014 preceded the explosion in “fake news”, it was never seen as a permanent fixture. Tardaguila, however, couldn’t let it go.

“I fell in love with fact-checking right away,” she said. So much so she resigned from the newspaper to create Agencia Lupa, which was conceived

as a news agency to provide fact-checking services and stories to paying subscribers, mostly media companies around Brazil.

“That was the trigger point to launch Lupa,” she said. “I was bitten by this mosquito and I wasn’t going back.”

The business model emerged from her experience with the blog, she said. Firstly, and most importantly, fact-checking had impact: presidential candidates “changed content on their websites or in their TV programmes because of O Globo’s fact-checks”. Secondly, O Globo managed to resell the blog, to be republished by small media around the country. “So many small newspapers, many small radios, were gathering that information and republishing it, and O Globo was actually making money out of that content,” Tardaguila explained.

Fact-checking also engaged audiences. “The social media team were completely in love with fact-checking,” Tardaguila explained. “People would retweet, comment, they were super super happy with it. And because of the previous reasons, we got huge page views. So, with those ideas in mind, after the election, I thought, I can’t go back.”

With start-up funds provided by a former employer, the documentarian and magazine publisher João Moreira Salles, Agencia Lupa was launched in November 2015 with a team of four people. “We started fact-checking and testing the business model,” Tardaguila said. “We became the first newswire service (in Brazil) to provide fact-checked content to media outlets that were interested in republishing our kind of content, and didn’t have the capacity to have an in-house unit. That’s how Lupa started.”

Soon after the launch, the issue of political polarization in society in Brazil, and in many other countries, exploded, as did the related scourge of mis- and disinformation.

“We didn’t call it fake news. We were calling it falsehoods, we were calling it lies. This was going to be big. Polarization was growing. The business model grew, because it had to.”

In fact, the problem outgrew the business model. Though it was conceived as a newswire service, fact-checking alone did not sufficiently respond to the impact ‘fake news’ was having on society, Tardaguila said. To help citizens better assess information themselves, she created an educational branch, Lupa Education, to help people increase their media literacy and –

not incidentally – to create a second revenue stream. “We started teaching not only in universities but also in secondary schools, in companies, in the judiciary system,” she said. “And we hired more people.”

A third revenue stream emerged in 2018, with Facebook’s third party fact-check programme, which hires independent fact-checkers to assess the Facebook news feed. “That opened our minds to reach out to platforms and proposed different projects to fight mis- and disinformation in their systems,” Tardaguila said. “So since then, we are working with Facebook, we are working with Google, we are working with WhatsApp.”

A fourth revenue stream – membership – is in the works, where individuals will be asked to subscribe to the service, Tardaguila said.

Agencia Lupa now has 22 employees, and has been generating a small profit since 2018.

“We didn’t call it fake news. We were calling it falsehoods, we were calling it lies. This was going to be big. Polarization was growing. The business model grew, because it had to.”

CRISTINA TARDAGUILA,
Founder, Agência Lupa, Brazil



“We started as a fact-checking unit, and now we are a hub against disinformation,” Tardaguila said. “Fact-checking is not enough. We realize that. Fact-checking is one tool in the battle against misinformation and disinformation. So we added education, we added partnerships with platforms. It’s not going to be just through journalism. It has to be through projects that have technological impact, it has to be through education, you have to go to schools and teach people. Just journalism will not be enough. We grew a lot.”

Tardaguila has some advice for those wishing to develop similar fact-checking services:

- ▶ Be careful with your clients and strive for impartiality. “We are not willing to work with the far left, far right, we are not willing to let our content be used,” she explained. “We were having some clients that would just pick the falsehoods about one person, and not the other one, because they were supporting that person. We dropped those. You have to try to be

non-partisan, even if it means losing money. These things might sound easy but they are not. You have to be ready for them and plan for them.”

- ▶ Follow the code of principles established by the International Fact-Checking Network, which calls for transparency in funding, methodology and sources. The IFCN promotes basic standards, tracks the impact of fact-checking, monitors trends, formats and policies, provides training, publishes a newsletter, and more.
- ▶ Develop a corrections policy and make it prominent. “Fact-checkers cannot make mistakes, and you have to be ready to correct yourself as soon as possible.”

Tardaguila also said journalists who do not have business and management skills should develop them and align with people who do before embarking on such a project.

“I learned this myself,” she said. “When I opened Lupa I had been a reporter and editor, and I didn’t have any skills in managing. I had to take an MBA. I didn’t know what a return of investment was. I didn’t know what break-even was, I didn’t know how to price. How much does a fact-check article cost? I

had to learn these things. If you don’t have these kind of skills, you have to look for people who can help you. Don’t start without a really good business plan and someone by your side to help with commercial, marketing, administration, finance, human resources. All of these things came up as I was rolling with it, and it almost drove me crazy.”

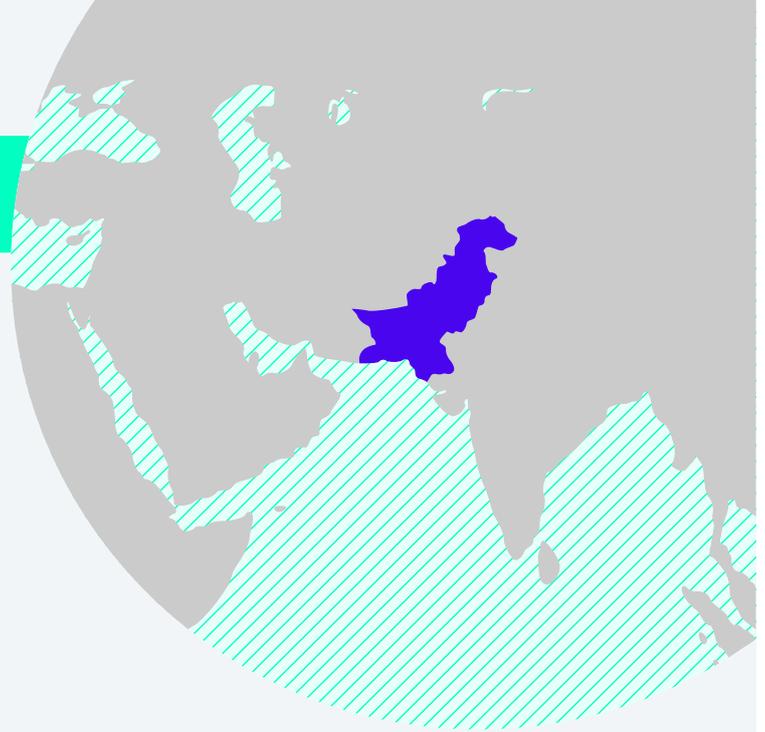
“We started as a fact-checking unit, and now we are a hub against disinformation. ... [W]e added education, we added partnerships with platforms.”

CRISTINA TARDAGUILA,
Founder, Agência Lupa, Brazil



CHAPTER 9

Pakistan: How the Jang Media Group emerged from the pandemic



For the Jang Media Group of Pakistan, the COVID-19 pandemic was a perfect storm. Circulation of its newspapers plummeted. Advertising disappeared. And with fewer readers and viewers, and less income, sustaining staff levels became untenable.

Worse, the pandemic occurred after the government reduced its advertising on which media had come to rely. And in the midst of the pandemic, the nation's newspapers' Labour Relations and Wage Board ordered an increase in journalists' salaries by no less than 148%. To compensate, the Board had recommended a similar increase in government advertising, but as of June 2021, the recommended increase had not arrived.

At the beginning of the crisis, in March and April of 2020, "we lost something like 30% of our circulation, and more than 50% of our advertising revenues," said Sarmad Ali, the Managing Director of the Jang Media Group and President of the All Pakistan Newspaper Society. "We've lost advertisers, we've lost readers, and most importantly, we've lost our capacity to retain and pay our human resources. That's the worst thing that has hit our newspapers in our part of the world."

The Jang Media Group is Pakistan's largest media group, with five daily newspapers and two weekly magazines as well as five satellite television channels and popular websites. It commands more than 65 percent of the country's total newspaper circulation.

The downturn led to layoffs of 22% of its workforce, or 1,200 people.

"The most painful aspect is that, as it is true in most markets, Pakistan media is resorting to the painful decision of laying off staff, and of pay cuts,"

Sarmad Ali said. “We have engaged with government on multiple levels, to provide some sort of bailout package to the media. We have requested for the governments to increase their spend and to create some sort of media workers job protection fund.” But that has yet to happen.

There was no single, simple way to respond to these multiple challenges, or to explain how the Jang Group bounced back and reclaimed much of the lost circulation and advertising revenue. But that indeed is what it did, taking a pro-active, multi-pronged approach to the myriad problems.

When the extent of the crisis began to emerge, the Jang Group underwent a reality check.

“We needed to reconnect with our stakeholders,” Sarmad Ali recalls.

“Our readers, our advertisers, our advertising agencies and, of course, our employees. We need to understand that 2019 is not coming back soon.

Things are not as they used to be. How long will it take? It’s anyone’s guess.

But as it settles down, we need to recreate our newspapers and our audiences and our advertisers, as well as communicate with our employees.”

“We needed to reconnect with our stakeholders. Our readers, our advertisers, our advertising agencies and, of course, our employees. We need to understand that 2019 is not coming back soon. Things are not as they used to be. How long will it take? It’s anyone’s guess.”

SARMAD ALI,

Managing Director, Jang Media Group, Pakistan

It might seem counterproductive to invest during a downturn, but the Jang group and the publishers’ association put money into advertising and marketing to bring back readers and advertisers, while strengthening the public’s perception of the community service role that independent media plays, especially during a crisis.

At the start of the outbreak, about one quarter of the readers of Jang’s print

publications canceled subscriptions and avoided newsstands because they were fearful of catching COVID from the deliverers and from the papers themselves, or because they were no longer going to the workplaces and schools where they received them.

“The first challenge for us, as publishers, was focusing on sustaining the penetration of newspapers. In Pakistan, 95 percent of newspaper sales is through delivery to homes and offices,” Sarmad Ali explained. In the first months of the crisis, “offices are gone, because of the lockdown, there are no longer deliveries to offices. Delivery to homes had fallen, because of this perception that the Corona virus can spread through touching the newspaper.”

The Jang Group and the All Pakistan Newspapers Society responded with a series of television commercials about safety practices that aimed to reassure the public there was no danger from the papers. The commercials, which showed printing presses rolling, stacks of papers being disinfected, and included assurances that newspapers were safe, succeeded in “busting the myth” that they spread the disease, Sarmad Ali said. “The campaign did have an impact.”

At first, “we weren’t able to gain our circulations back, but we were able to stop further decline,” he said. “In May and June 2020, we sustained the levels of circulation, we haven’t lost further.”

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)
It just got real!

With the world badly affected by the pandemic virus, it is high time for us in Pakistan to come together as a responsible nation, and fight against Coronavirus by slightly altering your lifestyle and being cautious.

Basic Steps
Social distancing, regular hand washing, keeping a sanitizer handy when outside, and wearing a facemask may save you from catching the virus.

Remember
Coronavirus is large in size hence facemask prevents its entry. Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze.

It stays on fabrics for up to 9 hours. Washing clothes, or staying exposed to the sun will serve the purpose of killing it.

Avoid touching public spaces like doors and counters, elevator buttons, etc., as your hands can carry the virus from such surfaces.

Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and nose with unwashed hands.

Stay Alert - Stay Safe - Stay Healthy

APNS
All Pakistan Newspapers Society

CORONAVIRUS SAFETY ALERT FOR NEWSPAPER READERS

With the outbreak of the coronavirus, it's sometimes hard to know what's safe and what's not. So, you may be tempted to ask...

CAN COVID-19 BE TRANSMITTED TO YOU THROUGH YOUR NEWSPAPER?

ABSOLUTELY NOT. NEWSPAPERS ARE SAFE TO TOUCH. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER OF THEM OR ANY OTHER TYPES OF PRINTED PAPER BEING CARRIERS OF COVID-19.

According to the World Health Organization, "the likelihood of an infected person transmitting environmental germs is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, touched, and exposed to different conditions and temperatures is also low."

The US-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has advised consumers that the virus has "a very low risk" of spreading on packages, newspapers and other mail due to the "poor survivability of these circumstances on surfaces."

Newspaper distributors and sellers have been advised nationwide by the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) to be especially mindful of their hygiene during the distribution process. Additionally, newspaper establishments have implemented strict sanitization measures.

However, it's always good to be extra careful. So, as a precaution, wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds after reading a newspaper, and that's it!

Keep reading your newspapers to stay aware because in these trying times, when things are spinning out of control, newspapers are particularly important. In times of crisis and great uncertainty, you need news you can trust. Credible news, not fake news.

STAY HOME. STAY SAFE. AND YES, ABOVE ALL, READ SAFE.

APNS

As the pandemic progressed, circulation began to rise again. "Circulations haven't gone back to old levels, but have improved, people have started buying newspapers."

The second challenge, in terms of revenue, was advertising, which "was the biggest loss we had. Most of the advertisers that were coming to newspapers were totally gone, and it was becoming difficult to get advertising to make newspapers vital again," Sarmad Ali said.

In response to the advertising downturn, the publishing community partnered with advertising industry groups to create a second campaign of six television commercials and six print ads around the theme, "let's advertise again". The campaign focused on the important relationship among advertisers, local media, readers and society as a whole, and the value of advertising to the economy. The campaign reminded advertisers that the country would recover, and that media would be there when it did. It praised first responders, and contained optimistic messages of hope and inspiration from leading publishers and celebrities, and focused on the role of the media to support positive change in society.

"We started working with various bodies, like the Advertising Association, Advertisers Society, and the Pakistan chapter of the International Advertising Association, with advertisements, presentations, Zoom webinars, and a positive campaign to start advertising again," Sarmad Ali said. "We believe advertising started coming back as a result of that campaign."



Advertising began to return in a trickle by June 2020, though not to pre-pandemic levels. “We know it is a long journey to get advertising back from where it started, but we hope this start will continue,” Sarmad Ali said. “Advertisers will need to understand that the demand for their products and services has not gone anywhere. It is still there, but they’ve just stopped advertising. So they need to restart advertising on television and digital and in the papers.”

As the private sector rebounded later in the crisis, so did advertising. “It is not what it used to be in 2018, but it is much better than what we feared in the first 4 or 5 months of COVID,” Sarmad Ali said. “It did start coming back from August, September (2020) onwards when we started to open up.”

But perhaps the biggest step was to create a third campaign to demonstrate the importance of independent media to the society, and providing reasons to support it. This campaign rallied around an event – National Readership Day, on 25 September – that involved governments and local authorities as well as other media. The initiative was designed to remind the public of the value that journalists provide for the public good, particularly in a crisis, and what would be lost if they disappeared. It focused on the danger of disinformation during the crisis, and how independent, credible media was the antidote to this scourge.

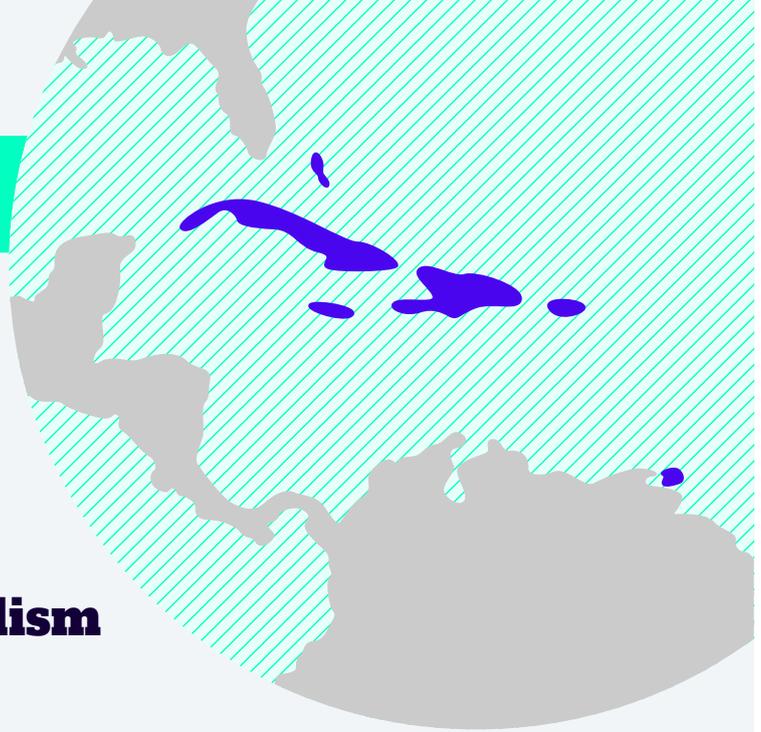
“We had a whole campaign: television, digital as well as newspapers and print. We involved the president, the prime minister, and the chief ministers of all the provinces and got them to endorse the day. That was a very positive step.”

“The other thing we did was, we tried to fight people’s impression of ‘fake news’,” Sarmad Ali said. “We said yes, social media is important, but the kind of ‘fake news’ you see on social media, you don’t see in other media, be it newspaper or television. So trust mainstream news media.”

September was also the month when schools began reopening, so the newspaper began a week-long free distribution of newspapers in the universities, in the hope it would generate new subscriptions. “And yes, that had an impact on circulations. Our circulation went up 3 percent as a result of the activities around Readership Day.” Overall, from the decline at the beginning of the crisis, “we’ve gained back about 50 percent of what we lost,” Sarmad Ali said. “We are back and here to stay.”

CHAPTER 10

The Caribbean: Cross-border collaboration strengthens investigative journalism



Kiran Maharaj says she is dedicated to “giving support and assistance and help to journalists behind the scenes”. As President of the Media Institute of the Caribbean and its major initiative, the Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network, she is well placed to do so.

The Institute engages in journalism training and advocacy for access to information, built around the heart of the organization, its investigative network. CIJN leverages cross-border collaboration to strengthen critical reporting across the region.

Investigative reporting is an expensive proposition, and so many news organizations around the world are coming together to combine resources to ensure that citizens receive the news and information they need. In this interview, Maharaj talks about the origins of the network, and the key components that are essential for its success.

What are the biggest challenges facing media in the Caribbean?

You have to remember you are dealing with a lot of countries that are small islands, so you have small populations, ranging from 90,000 to maybe 2.5 million in the English speaking region. And one of the things that obviously means is we have small economies, so when advertising gets cut that hurts us severely. In fact, some of our countries don't even have a daily newspaper.

We do a lot of our reporting online, we have one-person news platforms online, and in a recent study that we did, we found that 54 percent of journalists said they had to look for additional employment, because they were either let go from the newsrooms or they were reduced.

"We have to remember that media is the conscience and consciousness of society. If there is media extinction, it means the extinction of truth, the decay of democracy, and the death of sustainable societies."

KIRAN MAHARAJ,
President, Media Institute of the Caribbean



You are also looking at a situation where freedom of information and access to information is not something that is guaranteed. In fact, in the Pan-Caribbean region, there are only six countries that have such legislation, and even when the media here has made applications for information, we get very very long delays or we do not get the information at all.

There is a real threat of media capture, there is also a threat to independent journalism that we have to deal with daily.

We are trying to come together and work collectively, and support our journalists through entities like the Media Institute of the Caribbean, working with local media associations. We have to remember that media is the conscience and consciousness of society. If there is media extinction, it means the extinction of truth, the decay of democracy, and the death of sustainable societies.

What is the Institute doing to respond to these challenges?

We have started through the development of cross-border collaboration, and that's one of the key things that the Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC) does, because we have an investigative journalism online multimedia investigative journalism platform, the Caribbean Journalism Investigative Network. We are trying to build capacity throughout the region.

MIC focuses primarily on three things: one of them being training, particularly in investigative journalism. Then the multimedia news platform to encourage cross-border collaboration and investigative journalism, long form type narratives. And then advocacy is our other bucket. There is no accountability in the region. So we have to tackle it. Obviously investigative journalism is put at risk if we can't get access to information, and journalists are being put at risk when we ask the questions.

Let's talk about the investigative network. It's relatively new. What was the genesis of it, how does it work?

Our small societies are not always the best for doing investigative journalism, because of the degree of self-censorship. Everybody knows everybody, the media houses are afraid to carry some stories because the advertising can get cut, because very often those stories can encompass the names of politicians or the names of business owners who may be advertisers. In our region, about 50 percent of ad revenue comes from government and state entities.

This is why MIC started. It was born out of a need for training and development in the region, identified by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM). With the shift in technology in particular, it has become easier for us to tell the stories. Also, our journalists don't have any access to training in the region, and they can't take a sabbatical to go anywhere, they'll just be out of a job.

We have a signature fellowship programme that's done once a year, where we select 25 to 30 of the region's best journalists. They are immersed for a week with their peers from the region to train in investigative reporting, and we actually formalize investigative stories in that session.

After the first cohort, everyone was deployed into their newsrooms, and we realized that the media managers were very resistant to publishing some of the stories. It went back to the whole self-censorship issue. The ones that were interested didn't have the funding or capacity. So we launched the Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network to accommodate the process and to get the stories out. The media houses were much more comfortable with that, because we became essentially a newswire service. So they could lift the stories off of us and they could republish. Which is why multimedia is so important, because we want TV to have news clips and videos, we want print to have the photographs they need, we want radio to have podcasts and audio bites. And digital is easy, you can repost a link.

So the journalists work together across borders on specific investigative story ideas, and publish them on a common platform. How is it working?

For instance, I'll take the stories from Trinidad because I'm from Trinidad. In the Trinidad case there was a story on ISIS. If it was covered in Trinidad alone, you probably would only get a reach of 300,000 to 500,000 audience members. But what we saw was a multiple of six, throughout the region, because we put it on this platform. So Guyana picked it up, Jamaica picked



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Planning a CIJN story

it up, Antigua and Barbados picked it up, and then we got even more reach because the diaspora radio and podcasters in New York and Florida picked it up. So now you have an audience of maybe five to seven million being exposed to the story. That is the potential for that message and story being echoed, and having impact, and being able to influence policy. That's what we are mainly interested in and we were able to get it.

We have journalists now in 19 countries. There are over 200 alumni in terms of journalists who have gone through at least one of our training programs. We started by focusing on the English-speaking Caribbean, but now we've reached out to Spanish, Dutch and French speaking journalists.

These journalists in 19 countries, do they work for you, or are they working for media in their local countries?

They are free-lance for us. The majority of them are on staff of other media houses, who are always aware when they are doing a story for us. Because competition is big in the region, we ensure that no two people on a team come from the same media house when we put our stories together. If we have ten journalists assigned to a story, each of them would probably come from a different country, and different media house.

The benefit to the media house is two main things. One, they get an employee who is upskilled, which they can't afford to do, who brings back the expertise to the newsroom. Secondly, they get the opportunity to run the story exclusively when we release. So the Jamaican newspaper will run it exclusively, so will the Trinidad, so will Barbados. So the media houses like that because they get an exclusive, and they can say they were involved if they wish to say that. All journalists don't put their bylines on stories for obvious reasons, because we have to protect them.

In most cases, when the head of news or the editor knows they are working on this story, they will allow time, or they let reporters do it after work. We have not had a problem in this regard. So far the journalists have been very committed to what we've been doing. And we ensure these people are going to utilize what they've learned, because we have mentors involved in this too.

Who are these mentors, and where are they based? Do they work directly on the stories with the journalists?

The leader or mentor can be anywhere. It would be a veteran journalist. Our advisory board members play a role here sometimes – people like Brant Houston, Jim Clancy, Marcellus Alexander, Neil Nunes who is with the BBC, Wesley Gibbings, Julian Rogers, we have others.

How is the newsroom structured and what do they produce?

Under the team leader or mentor, we have the data gatherers, that is very important to investigative journalists. Then we have our investigative journalists lead team, who would be the senior writers, and then we have a junior team who would do some of the interviews, that kind of thing. And we have the photo journalists, they work together with an editor, who is the team leader, and the investigative journalists so they know what they need.

In terms of data, we have researchers, who comb the internet, archives and libraries, and then we pass on the data we think is relevant. We've been outsourcing with IRE – Investigative Reporters and Editors – who really do all of our data training right now.

Off of that, CJIN has a podcast that feeds on 10 different platforms, including Spotify. We can also outsource the multimedia elements.

We have social media shorts that we've produced. We did one documentary project, Paradise in Peril, which was on the hurricanes and how it impacted Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda. That was a pilot project just to see if

we could do a documentary for US\$ 25,000. Which we did. It was originally a project done for Living Water Community and the Mercy Foundation who do a lot of philanthropic work in the Eastern Caribbean. It was shown at the UN General Assembly meeting in September 2018. So we know we have the ability to do documentaries at a low budget.

Then there is our resource team, legal and associates. Legal, we obviously need them, we use them all the time, we check and double check things we're not sure about.

With the news team scattered across the region and beyond, how do they communicate?

We've been able to use things like Slack. Everyone has a VPN number that we pay for. We don't use WhatsApp a lot for sensitive material, Signal is what we encourage everybody to use. There are stories that are very very sensitive where we have to be careful with the team. So our budgeting always includes group meetings before publication. Basically we can function across borders in this way.

You have spoken about training, the stories and the platforms, and you've talked about the difficulty in getting access to data. Is advocacy for greater access to information a part of your program as well?

Yes. The first step is advocacy among the influencers, so Transparency International bodies throughout the region have become very important for us, and that's one of the mechanisms we are working through. The other is to get the journalists to understand what we are dealing with.

What we are doing right now behind the scenes is, we started a legislative review. We can make many recommendations but if we don't actually draft a clause or clauses, and say, 'here, is what we need you to do', governments take forever.

Once we get this legislative review done – because there are subtle differences in the legislation, island to island – we can take it to CARICOM (the Caribbean Community, which promotes economic integration) and advocate alongside partners to get it going. We also intend to have meetings with the diplomatic corps regionally, so we have started having those casual conversations with some of them. We are also looking for setting up a fund

for freedom of information fights. Because we are being denied (access to information) in some cases, and we want to challenge. The media houses don't have the funding in some cases to challenge.

The MIC's activities are wide-ranging. How do you fund this work?

The funding has come really through grants that have come through the US Embassy, UNESCO, and the development fund in the Media Institute of the Caribbean. The way the development fund works is, when companies sponsor our programs, a large percentage of that income goes back into the development fund, which goes into CIJN. We now also have a grant from the Open Society Foundations, where we are monitoring covid relief throughout 14 Caribbean countries.

As a non-profit we have to be very careful, we've never gone to governments in the region, we hope we never have to go there. We've been fortunate, our baseline budget every year is US\$200,000. The expenses go up based on our programmes and what we are doing. So you're looking at US\$200,000 low end, up to US\$300,000. As we expand, we will go up, obviously.

Are you able to produce revenue from the investigative news platform, or any of your other initiatives?

In terms of monetization, we have a couple of different revenue streams we want to develop. One of them is subscription for exclusive content. A lot of the multimedia stories, we get interviews that have real value in them. So if we were able to have an on demand option, where people could take exclusive content, and use it whenever or however they want to, then that would be one revenue stream for us.

Another revenue stream, and we are in discussions, is to do a Caribbean roundup TV show, because again, it is repurposing the content. That would give us some revenue and income there as well.

Another one is documentaries. I believe we have the capacity in this region to do short films or feature films or documentaries that can be sold outside. You also have a lot of livestream platforms now, and the Caribbean diaspora is huge. So it will provide opportunities.

We are also thinking of using our experiences to create a consultancy, possibly to advise organizations in other regions who have been asking for advice as they work on establishing similar ventures.

If you were doing a consultancy today, what would be the three key points for setting up an organization like this? What would be the most important things?

The top of the list for me would be to be very open minded and able to adapt to anything. Be ready to upskill yourself on technology too. You don't need to be a guru, but you better stay on top of it. That is very important – if you don't have an open mind to this, and if you're thinking the real media was 30 years ago, you're never going to get anywhere.

Secondly, be very clear about the big picture. Be very clear on where this is headed over the next three to five years. If you're not clear on that, nothing you do today is going to make sense. And when I say be ready, I think we were fortunate in our planning, when we had different timelines for each of our objectives, we knew there was the possibility we would have to pivot. And that's why we were resilient. And you have to be prepared for this.

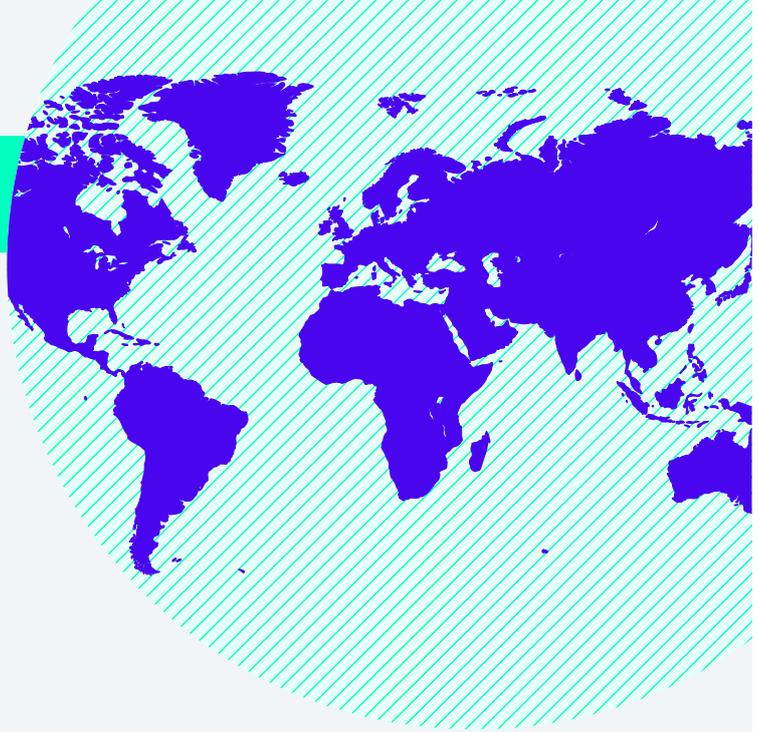
And also – this might sound like philosophical advice, but I would see the other most important thing is, be prepared to work day and night. There really is no time for sleep sometimes. If you are not fully committed to this, you'll be dead in the water.



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CHAPTER 11

Global: A fund for new approaches to media development



James Deane and Khadija Patel have very different backgrounds and perspectives in the media world, but both have come to the same conclusion about the future: independent news media are collapsing at an alarming rate, and face extinction without radical new strategies and approaches to sustain them.

“Public interest journalism doesn’t have a model to sustain itself,” said Deane in an interview for this chapter. This observation comes from a person who has spent more than three decades in the media development sector, including in his role as the director of policy and research for BBC Media Action, the development arm of the BBC.

“About three or four years ago, I was becoming increasingly concerned that the whole premise of media development – which is to work towards a long-term but ultimately achievable goal of an editorially independent, sustainable media system – was becoming less and less possible,” he said. “The whole enterprise of democracy building with media was failing. We are losing this battle, and we need to do something. Part of that is to acknowledge we are losing. And there is no solution to this without more funding.”

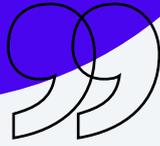
Patel, the former editor-in-chief of South Africa’s Mail & Guardian, arrived at a similar conclusion via a different route. She experienced the problem firsthand, required as a newsroom leader to explain why round after round of cutbacks was necessary, while struggling with declining resources to produce the quality journalism expected from such a storied publication.

“What you have as a human being, as a manager, is to face people constantly and explain why is there another round of retrenchment, why are we letting people go again, why are we not refilling a (vacant) position,” she said.

“The whole enterprise of democracy building with media was failing. We are losing this battle, and we need to do something. Part of that is to acknowledge we are losing. And there is no solution to this without more funding.”

JAMES DEANE,

Consultant, International Fund for Public Interest Media



“When you have your job continually demeaned, when we are under so much pressure from the public and politicians, and when you still don’t know whether you’re actually going to have a job at the end of the year, it is dispiriting, right?”

She added: “On top of that is the knowledge that we have to do things radically differently.”

The two have come together in supporting the International Fund for Public Interest Media; Deane, as a consultant, and Patel, as head of programming.

The aim is to seek to redefine media assistance as well as add significant new funds to those currently available for media development.

Background research for the IFPIM describes the media landscape as marked by the disruption of the media business model – particularly the migration of advertising to the big digital platforms. This severe reduction in revenue, along with growing authoritarianism and the co-option of media, poses an enormous threat to independent media and the societies they serve. Corruption, extremism, and mis- and disinformation thrive where independent media are weak, and their influence grows as independent media decline.

Despite the accelerating crisis, and widespread recognition that it should be an urgent policy priority, the percentage of official overseas development assistance (ODA) available for media has long remained static: about 0.3 percent of ODA, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. A long-term goal of the Fund for Public Interest Media is to bring a billion US dollars of additional funding for public interest journalism around the world.

By mid-2021, the Fund had secured operational funding from Luminate, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the National Endowment for Democracy, and was seeking capital from governments, big tech and other private sector companies, development agencies, philanthropists, and others.

In addition to bringing new money to the table, the Fund's mission is to enable media markets to work for democracy, and to find long-term systemic, as well as institutional, solutions to media market failure in low- and middle-income countries. Funding is designed to go directly to media institutions, to meet the gap between what the market or other sources of funding can provide, and what the institution needs to generate public interest journalism.

The heart and soul of the initiative is the Fund's feasibility study, a 40,000-word tome that includes a variety of issues, scenarios, practices, ideas and possible outcomes about how the fund might work. It sets out possible approaches for the distribution of funds, guaranteeing independence, avoiding market distortion, dealing with resistance, governance, and much more. But much remains on the table to be resolved as the Fund develops.

"The detailed feasibility study remains the principal reference point for the fund," said Deane. "The concept and the principles and the governance and the exit strategy and so on have not really changed. It is also worth saying that a lot of our focus has been on: 'is it really going to work?'"

"It's a huge undertaking, and we've made very clear if we can't attract the minimum investment necessary to make it worth setting up, then we won't go ahead with it – there needs to be a minimal viable product."

As the Fund is designed to be a long-term support mechanism, it will take time for the structures and practices to be established. But there is also a sense of urgency – the crisis is rapid and there isn't a lot of time; independent media outlets are disappearing day by day.

"I'll be perfectly honest, this is not what we'd like to do, spending money quickly, with a new fund," said Deane.

"This is meant to be a long-term strategic, embedded process where funding really has got a long-term strategy behind it. But we are conscious, if we can raise substantial additional money, and (at the current moment when) media companies are going out of business left, right and center, that we've got a duty to try to respond to that as quickly as possible."

Among other activities, the Fund is conducting in-depth research into a handful of diverse and geographically different media markets, to try to define the issues and address the outstanding questions. This exercise includes not only quantitative research on media markets, but also engagement with media companies and workers to help define their needs, and get wider views on how the Fund can respond.

“We are speaking to people within the industry, journalists, the whole gamut, to understand if people believe there is a need for the Fund, what is the need, how could media development be best delivered? Who is doing what?”, said Patel. “One of the difficulties we have is there is very little comprehensive data about development activities around the world. It is difficult and time consuming to go through each organization, each country, each philanthropic organization that might be supporting media development. So we are just trying to be at the level of: who is doing the work, where that money is going, what the successes are, where the need is.”

If all goes well, the Fund hopes to begin disbursements in mid-2022, but the launch date – or even if it will launch – depends on whether or not it can raise a critical mass of funds. Deane said a minimum would be US\$60 million on an annual basis, and even then that would depend on how confident future growth prospects are. The long-term target is \$1 billion. “Just to be clear, any money we get has to be additional money. So this means 60 to 100 million dollars for media that wasn’t there before. This is no easy thing.”

Though there is much that is still to become clear, there is increasing optimism about the Fund and its goals. “The thing that encourages me working here is that it is an initiative with positive potential,” said Patel.

“So much of our work in journalism and in newsrooms right now just feels like, we are rowing a boat with a giant hole in it. ... If we are better financed, in addition to having better managed newsrooms, we will have effective media.”

KHADIJA PATEL,
*Head of Programming, International
Fund for Public Interest Media*



“So much of our work in journalism and in newsrooms right now just feels like, we are rowing a boat with a giant hole in it,” she said. “That despite our best efforts, we are going nowhere. We are just circling the drain. For me, (the Fund) is something that has positive potential. I believe if we are better financed, in addition to having better managed newsrooms, we will have effective media. And then we can work out the regulatory reform and all that has to happen, but we first have to have journalism being done to get to that point.”

References and Resources

Chapter 1 (Journalism Education)

- **A Map of Digital Media Enterprises in Latin America and a new curriculum for entrepreneurial journalism**
“Inflection Point” and “Starting Point” are available in English and Spanish from the SembraMedia website, <https://www.sembraedia.org/>, which also includes the curriculum in Spanish. Professors interested in joining the Network of Professors of Entrepreneurial Journalism can do so through <https://profesores.sembraedia.org>.
- **How Entrepreneurial Journalism Will Change Our World**
What does the new business model for journalism need to be in a world where the average citizen is increasingly expecting journalism to be a service provided for free (or at least, subsidized by someone else)? <https://www.rohitbargava.com/2011/01/how-entrepreneurial-journalism-will-change-our-world.html>

Chapter 2 (Indonesia)

- **How IDN Media Grew From a Hobby Project Into One of Indonesia’s Fastest Growing Millennial Sites**
An interview with founder Winson Utomo <https://splicemedia.com/stories/winston-utomo-idn-times-indonesia-millennial-sites>
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<https://www.idn.media/>

Chapter 3 (Chile)

- **Chilean Payment Platform Helps Independent and Local Media Bring in More Money**
An interview with founder Michael Paz. <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/chilean-payment-platform-revenue-helps-organizations-independent-and-local-media-to-bring-in-more-money/>
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<https://revenue.com/>

Chapter 4 (Lebanon)

- **There is Hope for Traditional Media and Especially the Press**
Interview with Michel Helou, Executive Director of L'Orient-Le Jour
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6qiNvERtbs>
- **Digital Media Start-Ups in the Arab World**
A report by the Maharat Foundation on digital media entrepreneurs in Lebanon, Morocco and Jordan. <https://digitalmediaviability.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Digital-Media-Startup-Companies-in-the-Arab-world-2019.pdf>
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A position statement from the Free Press Initiative in Zambia
<https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/05/03/free-press-require-independent-fearless-and-balanced-journalism-fpi/>
- **Zambia's Media Cuts Jobs, Salaries Due to COVID-19 Reveals FPI Survey**
The Free Press Initiative Conducts a COVID Impact Survey with the World Association of News Publishers.
<http://www.wan-ifa.org/articles/2020/08/25/about-8-of-zambias-media-cuts-jobs-salaries-due-to-COVID-19-reveals-fpi-survey>

Chapter 6 (South Africa)

- **Challenges faced by community radio stations & interventions to resolve them**
A government briefing from the Media Development and Diversity Agency.
<https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/29780/>
- **Media Development and Diversity Agency**
<https://www.mdda.org.za/>
- **Ugu Youth Radio**
<https://www.facebook.com/uguyouthradio/>

- **Jozi FM**
<https://www.jozifm.co.za/>
- **Radio Riverside**
<https://www.facebook.com/riverside982fm/>

Chapter 7 (Public Media)

- **The Public Media Alliance**
<https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/>

Chapter 8 (Brazil)

- **Lupa, the First Fact-checking Agency in Brazil**
A selection of stories fact-checked by the agency.
<https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/lupa/>
- **The International Fact-Checking Network**
An initiative of the Poynter Institute, the network brings together fact-checking organizations from around the world to share best practices and promote media literacy. <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/>

Chapter 9 (Pakistan)

- **How Jang Media Pulled Through the COVID-19 Crisis**
Managing Director Sarmad Ali talks about the experience at the 2020 Asia Media Leaders eSummit (Timecode 24:24 on the recording)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XurngQTQVV8&list=PLoI_JTd83w-oSuOIm5VImjSdQYAKCvbBv&index=4
- **The Media Lab, Pakistan's first digital media startup incubator launched**
An initiative of Media Matters for Democracy, the Media Lab will help refine and develop innovative start-up ideas for digital media and journalism in the country. <https://www.digitalrightsmonitor.pk/new-initiative-launched-to-support-media-innovation-in-pakistan/>

Chapter 10 (The Caribbean)

- **An Investigative Journalism Network for the Caribbean**
The Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network is the region's premier organization producing stories for multiple platforms. <https://www.cijn.org/>

Chapter 11 (International Fund for Public Interest Media)

- **International Fund for Public Interest Media** <https://ifpim.org/>
The Fund's Feasibility Study, "Enabling Media Markets to Work for Democracy", <https://ifpim.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IFPIM-Feasibility-Study-Final-April-29.pdf>

World Press Freedom Day and the UNESCO Media Viability Project

- **UNESCO Media Viability Indicators Map the Landscape**
The UNESCO Media Viability Indicators provide a tool for measuring the level of media sustainability in any given country.
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/IPDC/ipdc59_Media_viability_indicators.pdf
- **Media Viability: A Pillar of Good Information and Public Trust**
Independent media the world over are under threat and need additional support to strengthen their viability if they are to continue to provide the news and information that are essential to democracy and sustainable development. <https://en.unesco.org/news/media-viability-pillar-information-public-good>
- **Plenary Session on Media Viability at World Press Freedom Day Conference, 3 May 2021**
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Global Media Viability Projects

- **Community-Powered Journalism: A Manual for Growth and Sustainability in Independent News**
Lessons on how news outlets can better serve their communities, with case studies, management advice and more.
<https://communitypoweredjournalism.com/>
- **Media Viability: Six Strategies for Success**
Advances in technology have disrupted the media ecosystem. There is no single way to overcome the economic challenges of running a media outlet, but there are patterns. What do successful media companies do differently? <https://www.dw.com/en/media-viability-6-strategies-for-success/a-48851981>

- **The Reuters Institute Digital News Report**
The annual reports tracks developments in digital media, including progress on pay models, social media use, digital news consumption and much more. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/>
- **A New Deal For Journalism**
The report by the Forum on Information & Democracy's working group on the sustainability of journalism presents a plan to guarantee up to 0.1% of GDP a year into journalism to safeguard its function in the future. <https://informationdemocracy.org/2021/06/16/the-forum-on-information-and-democracy-calls-for-a-new-deal-for-journalism/>
- **The Global Forum for Media Development**
The GFMD provides a number of resources and working groups for building the sustainability of journalism. <https://gfmd.info/internet-governance/>
- **Journalism and the Pandemic**
The International Center for Journalists and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University conducted a large-scale global survey of journalists during the pandemic to map the impact of the pandemic on the profession. <https://www.icfj.org/our-work/journalism-and-pandemic-survey>
- **News Organizations Are Taking Steps to Recover From a Year of Trauma**
An American Press Institute report on seven important challenges for local and regional news organizations to consider as they try to rebound from these ongoing struggles. <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/articles/how-local-news-organizations-are-taking-steps-to-recover-from-a-year-of-trauma/single-page/How Local>



The pandemic brought to crisis point prior trends facing independent news media, whether online or offline or hybrid. While media became more important than ever for citizens as a source of reliable information in an insecure and continuously changing world, newsrooms struggled to pay their bills. Already under financial pressure, many independent media have had to cut staff and even close shop.

Transforming this moment of crisis into a window of opportunity, however, many in the media community, officialdom, academia, civil society and the private sector are taking action. They have come up with innovative ways to strengthen viability through initiatives that produce revenue and contribute to the central mission of independent journalism.

Their efforts are a source of inspiration for media enterprises all around the world. To help multiply the achievements, this UNESCO publication profiles 11 case studies that can help ensure media viability without compromising editorial independence and journalistic integrity.



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